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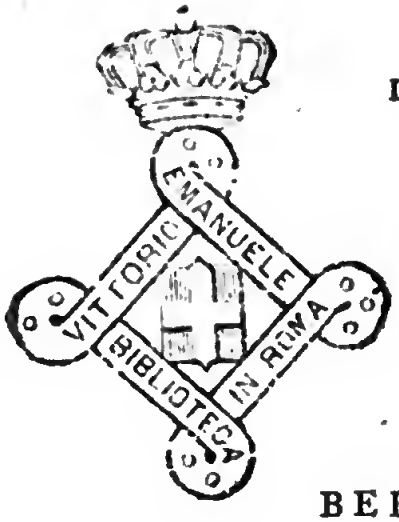
A NOVEL.

BY

OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "STRATHMORE," "CHANDOS,"
ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1871.

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UNDER TWO FLAGS.

CHAPTER I.

"Beauty of the Brigades."

"I DON'T say but what he's difficult to please with his Tops," said Mr. Rake, factotum to the Hon. Bertie Cecil, of the 1st Life Guards, with that article of hunting toggery suspended in his right hand as he paused, before going upstairs, to deliver his opinions with characteristic weight and vivacity to the stud-groom, "he is uncommon particular about 'em; and if his leathers ain't as white as snow he'll never touch 'em, tho' as soon as the pack come nigh him at Royallieu, the leathers might just as well never have been cleaned, them hounds jump about him so; old Champion's at his saddle before you can say Davy Jones. Tops are trials, I ain't denying that, specially when you've jacks, and moccasins, and moor boots, and Russia-leather crickets, and turf hacks, and Hythe boots, and waterproofs, and all manner of varnish things for dress, that none of the boys will do right unless you look after 'em yourself. But is it likely that *he* should know what a worry a Top's complexion is, and how hard it is to come right with all the Fast Brown polishing in the world? how should *he* guess what a piece of work it is to get 'em all of a color, and how like they are to come mottled, and how a'most sure they'll ten to one go off dark just as they're growing yellow, and put you to shame, let you do what you will to make 'em cut a shine

over the country? How should *he* know? *I* don't complain of that; bless you *he* never thinks. It's 'do this, Rake,' 'do that,' and *he* never remembers 'tisn't done by magic. But he's a true gentleman, Mr. Cecil; never grudge a guinea, or a fiver to you; never out of temper neither, always have a kind word for you if you want, thoro'bred every inch of him; see him bring down a rocketter, or lift his horse over the Broad Water! He's a gentleman—not like your snobs that have nothing sound about 'em but their cash, and swept out their shops before they bought their fine feathers!—and I'll be d—d if I care what I do for him."

With which peroration to his born-enemy the stud-groom, with whom he waged a perpetual and most lively feud, Rake flourished the tops that had been under discussion, and triumphant, as he invariably was, ran up the back stairs of his master's lodgings in Piccadilly, opposite the Green Park, and with a rap on the panels entered his master's bed-room.

A Guardsman at home is always, if anything, rather more luxuriously accommodated than a young Duchess, and Bertie Cecil was never behind his fellows in anything; besides, he was one of the cracks of the Household, and women sent him pretty things enough to fill the Palais Royal. The dressing-table was littered with Bohemian glass and gold-stoppered bottles, and all the perfumes of Araby represented by Breidenbach and Rimmel. The dressing-case was of silver, with the name studded on the lid in turquoises; the brushes, boot-jacks, boot-trees, whip-stands, were of ivory and tortoiseshell; a couple of tiger-skins were on the hearth with a retriever and blue greyhound in possession; above the mantlepiece were crossed swords in all the varieties of gilt, gold, silver, ivory, aluminium, chiseled and embossed hilts; and on

the walls were a few perfect French pictures, with the portraits of a greyhound drawn by Landseer, of a steeple-chaser by Harry Hall, one or two of Herring's hunters, and two or three fair women in crayons. The hangings of the room were silken and rose-coloured, and a delicious confusion prevailed through it pell-mell, box-spurs, hunting stirrups, cartridge-cases, curb chains, muzzle-loaders, hunting-flasks, and white gauntlets, being mixed up with Paris novels, pink notes, point-lace ties, bracelets, and bouquets to be dispatched to various destinations, and velvet and silk bags for bank-notes, cigars, or vesuvians, embroidered by feminine fingers and as useless as those pretty fingers themselves. On the softest of sofas, half-dressed, and having half an hour before splashed like a water-dog out of the bath, as big as a small pond, in the dressing-chamber beyond, was the Hon. Bertie himself, second son of Viscount Royallieu, known generally in the Brigades as "Beauty." The appellative, gained at Eton, was in no way undeserved; when the smoke cleared away that was circling round him out of a great meerschaum-bowl, it showed a face of as much delicacy and brilliancy as a woman's, handsome, thoro'bred, languid, nonchalant, with a certain latent recklessness under the impassive calm of habit, and a singular softness given to the large, dark hazel eyes by the unusual length of the lashes over them. His features were exceedingly fair, fair as the fairest girl's; his hair was of the softest, silkiest, brightest chestnut; his mouth very beautifully shaped; on the whole, with a certain gentle, mournful love-me look that his eyes had with them, it was no wonder that great ladies and gay lionnes alike gave him the palm as the handsomest man in all the Household Regiments—not even excepting that splendid golden-haired Colossus, his oldest friend and closest comrade, known as "the Seraph."

He looked at the new tops that Rake swung in his hand, and shook his head.

"Better, Rake; but not right yet. *Can't* you get that tawny color in the tiger's skin there? You go so much to brown."

Rake shook his head in turn, as he set down the incorrigible tops beside six pairs of their fellows, and six times six of every other sort of boots that the covert side, the heather, the flat, or the "sweet shady side of Pall Mall" ever knew.

"Do my best, sir; but Polish don't come nigh Nature, Mr. Cecil."

"Goes beyond it, the ladies say; and to do them justice, they favour it much the most," laughed Cecil to himself, floating fresh clouds of Turkish about him. "Willon up?"

"Yes, sir. Come in this minute for orders."

"How'd Forest King stand the train?"

"Bright as a bird, sir; *he* never mind nothing. Mother o' Pearl she worretted a little, he says; she always do, along of the engine noise; but the King walked in and out just as if the stations were his own stable-yard."

"He gave them gruel and chilled water after the shaking before he let them go to their corn?"

"He *says* he did, sir."

Rake would by no means take upon himself to warrant the veracity of his sworn foe, the stud-groom; unremitting feud was between them; Rake considered that he knew more about horses than any other man living, and the other functionary proportionately resented back his knowledge and his interference, as utterly out of place in a body-servant.

"Tell him I'll look in at the stable after duty and see the screws are all right; and that he's to be ready to

go down with them by my train to-morrow—noon, you know. Send that note there, and the bracelets, to St. John's Wood: and that white bouquet to Mrs. Delamaine. Bid Willon get some Banbury bits; I prefer the revolving mouths, and some of Wood's double mouths and Nelson gags; we want new ones. Mind that lever-snap breech-loader comes home in time. Look in at the Commission stables, and if you see a likely black charger as good as Black Douglas, tell me. Write about the stud fox-terrier, and buy the blue Dandy Dinmont; Lady Guinevere wants him. I'll take him down with me. But first put me into harness, Rake; it's getting late."

Murmuring which multiplicity of directions, for Rake to catch as he could, in the softest and sleepiest of tones, Bertie Cecil drank a glass of Curaçoa, put his tall, lithe limbs indolently off his sofa, and surrendered himself to the martyrdom of cuirass and gorget, standing six feet one without his spurred jacks, but light-built and full of grace as a deer, or his weight would not have been what it was in gentleman-rider races from the Hunt steeple-chase at La Marche to the Grand National in the Shires.

"As if Parliament couldn't meet without dragging us through the dust! The idiots write about 'the swells in the Guards,' as if we had all fun and no work, and knew nothing of the rough of the Service. I should like to learn what they call sitting motionless in your saddle through half a day, while a London mob goes mad round you, and lost dogs snap at your charger's nose, and dirty little beggars squeeze against your legs, and the sun broils you, or the fog soaks you, and you sit sentinel over a ginger-bread coach till you're deaf with the noise, and blind with the dust, and sick with the crowd, and half dead for want of sodas and brandies, and from going a whole morning without one cigarette! not to mention the

inevitable apple-woman who invariably entangles herself between your horse's legs, and the certainty of your riding down somebody and having a summons about it the next day! If all that isn't the rough of the Service, I should like to know what is. Why, the hottest day in the batteries, or the sharpest rush into Ghoorkahs or Bhoteahs, would be light work compared!" murmured Cecil with the most plaintive pity for the hardships of life in the Household, while Rake, with the rapid proficiency of long habit, braced and buckled and buttoned, knotted the sash with the knack of professional genius, girt on the brightest of all glittering polished silver steel "Cut-and-Thrusts," with its rich gilt mountings, and contemplated with flattering self-complacency leathers white as snow, jacks brilliant as black varnish could make them, and silver spurs of glittering radiance, until his master stood full harnessed, at length, as gallant a Life Guardsman as ever did duty at the Palace by making love to the handsomest lady-in-waiting.

"To sit wedged in with one's troop for five hours, and in a drizzle too! Houses oughtn't to meet until the day's fine; I'm sure *they* are in no hurry," said Cecil to himself, as he pocketed a dainty, filmy handkerchief, all perfume, point, and embroidery, with the interlaced B. C., and the crest on the corner, while he looked hopelessly out of the window. He was perfectly happy, drenched to the skin on the moors after a royal, or in a fast thing with the Melton men from Thorpe Trussels to Ranksborough; but three drops of rain when on duty were a totally different matter, to be resented with any amount of dandy's lamentations, and epicurean diatribes.

"Ah, young one, how are you? Is the day *very* bad?" he asked with languid wistfulness as the door opened.

But indifferent and weary—on account of the weather—as the tone was, his eyes rested with a kindly, cordial light on the new-comer, a young fellow of scarcely twenty, like himself in feature, though much smaller and slighter in build, a graceful boy enough, with no fault in his face, except a certain weakness in the mouth, just shadowed only, as yet, with down.

A celebrity, the Zu-Zu, the last coryphée whom Bertie had translated from a sphere of garret bread-and-cheese to a sphere of villa, champagne and chicken (and who, of course, in proportion to the previous scarcity of her bread-and-cheese grew immediately intolerant of any wine less than 90*s*. the dozen), said that Cecil cared for nothing longer than a fortnight, unless it were his horse, Forest King. It was very ungrateful in the Zu-Zu, since he cared for her at the least a whole quarter, paying for his fidelity at the tone of a hundred a month; and, also, it was not true, for besides Forest King, he loved his young brother Berkeley:—which however she neither knew nor guessed.

"Beastly!" replied that young gentleman, in reference to the weather, which was indeed pretty tolerable for an English morning in February. "I say, Bertie—are you in a hurry?"

"The very deuce of a hurry, little one: why?" Bertie never was in a hurry, however, and he said this as lazily as possible, shaking the white horsehair over his helmet, and drawing in deep draughts of Turkish Latakia previous to parting with his pipe for the whole of four or five hours.

"Because I am in a hole—no end of a hole—and I thought you'd help me," murmured the boy, half penitently, half caressingly; he was very girlish in his face and his ways. On which confession, Rake retired into

the bath-room; he could hear just as well there, and a sense of decorum made him withdraw, though his presence would have been wholly forgotten by them. In something the same spirit as the French countess accounted for her employing her valet to bring her her chocolate in bed—"Est-ce que vous appelez *cette chose-là* un homme?" —Bertie had on occasion, so wholly regarded servants as necessary furniture, that he had gone through a love scene, with that handsome coquette Lady Regalia, totally oblivious of the presence of the groom of the chambers, and the possibility of that person's appearance in the witness-box of the Divorce Court. It was in no way his passion that blinded him—he did not put the steam on like that, and never went in for any disturbing emotion, —it was simply habit, and forgetfulness that those functionaries were not born mute, deaf, and sightless.

He tossed some essence over his hands, and drew on his gauntlets.

"What's up, Berk?"

The boy hung his head, and played a little uneasily with an ormolu terrier-pot, upsetting half the tobacco in it; he was trained to his brother's nonchalant impenetrable school, and used to his brother's set, a cool, listless, reckless, thoro'bred, and impassive set, whose first canon was that you must lose your last thousand in the world without giving a sign that you winced, and must win half a million without showing that you were gratified; but he had something of girlish weakness in his nature, and a reserve in his temperament that was with difficulty conquered.

Bertie looked at him, and laid his hand gently on the young one's shoulder.

"Come, my boy, out with it! It's nothing very bad, I'll be bound?"

"I want some more money; a couple of ponies," said

the boy a little huskily; he did not meet his brother's eyes that were looking straight down on him.

Cecil gave a long low whistle, and drew a meditative whiff from his meerschaum.

"Très cher, you're always wanting money. So am I. So is everybody. The normal state of man is to want money. Two ponies. What's it for?"

"I lost it at chicken-hazard last night. Poulteney lent it me, and I told him I would send it him in the morning. The ponies were gone before I thought of it, Bertie, and I haven't a notion where to get them to pay him again."

"Heavy stakes, young one, for *you*," murmured Cecil, while his hand dropped from the boy's shoulder, and a shadow of gravity passed over his face; money was very scarce with himself. Berkeley gave him a hurried appealing glance. He was used to shift all his anxieties on to his elder brother, and to be helped by him under any difficulty. Cecil never allotted two seconds' thought to his own embarrassments, but he would multiply them tenfold by taking other people's on him as well with an unremitting and thoughtless good nature.

"I couldn't help it," pleaded the lad with coaxing and almost piteous apology. "I backed Grosvenor's play, and you know he's always the most wonderful luck in the world. I couldn't tell he'd go a crowner and have such cards as he had. How shall I get the money, Bertie? I daren't ask the governor; and besides I told Poulteney he should have it this morning. What do you think if I sold the mare? But then I couldn't sell her in a minute——"

Cecil laughed a little, but his eyes as they rested on the lad's young, fair, womanish face were very gentle under the long shade of their lashes.

"Sell the mare! Nonsense! How should anybody live without a hack! I can pull you through, I dare say. Ah! by George, there's the quarters chiming. I shall be too late, as I live."

Not hurried still, however, by that near prospect, he sauntered to his dressing-table, took up one of the pretty velvet and gold-filigreed absurdities, and shook out all the bank-notes there were in it. There were fives and tens enough to count up 45*l.* He reached over and caught up a five from a little heap lying loose on a novel of Du Terrail's, and tossed the whole across the room to the boy.

"There you are, young one! But don't borrow of any but your own people again, Berk. *We* don't do that. No, no!—no thanks. Shut up all that. If ever you get in a hole, I'll take you out if I can. Good-by—will you go to the Lords? Better not,—nothing to see, and still less to hear. All stale. That's the only comfort for us, —we *are* outside!" he said, with something that almost approached hurry in the utterance, so great was his terror of anything approaching a scene, and so eager was he to escape his brother's gratitude. The boy had taken the notes with delighted thanks indeed, but with that tranquil and unprotesting readiness with which spoiled childishness or unhesitating selfishness, accepts gifts and sacrifices from another's generosity, which have been so general that they have ceased to have magnitude. As his brother passed him, however, he caught his hand a second, and looked up with a mist before his eyes, and a flush half of shame, half of gratitude, on his face.

"What a trump you are!—how good you are, Bertie!"

Cecil laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"First time I ever heard it, my dear boy," he an-

swered, as he lounged down the staircase, his chains clashing and jingling, while pressing his helmet on to his forehead and pulling the chin scale over his moustaches, he sauntered out into the street where his charger was waiting.

"The deuce!" he thought, as he settled himself in his stirrups, while the raw morning wind tossed his white plume hither and thither. "I never remembered!—I don't believe I've left myself money enough to take Willon and Rake and the cattle down to the Shires to-morrow. If I shouldn't have kept enough to take my own ticket with!—that would be no end of a sell. On my word I don't know how much there's left on the dressing-table. Well! I can't help it; Poulteney had to be paid; I can't have Berk's name show in anything that looks shady."

The 50*l.* had been the last remnant of a bill, done under great difficulties with a sagacious Jew, and Cecil had no more certainty of possessing any more money until next pay-day should come round than he had of possessing the moon; lack of ready money, moreover, is a serious inconvenience when you belong to clubs where "pounds and fives" are the lowest points, and live with men who take the odds on most events in thousands; but the thing was done; he would not have undone it at the boy's loss if he could; and Cecil, who never was worried by the loss of the most stupendous "crusher," and who made it a rule never to think of disagreeable inevitabilities two minutes together, shook his charger's bridle and cantered down Piccadilly toward the barracks, while Black Douglas reared, curveted, made as if he would kick, and finally ended by "passaging" down half the length of the road, to the prominent peril of all passers-by, and looking eminently glossy, handsome, stal-

wart, and foam-flecked, while he thus expressed his disapprobation of forming part of the escort from Palace to Parliament.

"Home Secretary should see about it; it's abominable! If we must come among them, they ought to be made a little odoriferous first. A couple of fire-engines now, playing on them continuously with rose-water and bouquet d'Ess, for an hour before we come up, might do a little good. I'll get some men to speak about it in the house; call it 'Bill for the Purifying of the Unwashed, and Prevention of their Suffocating Her Majesty's Brigades,'" murmured Cecil to the Earl of Broceliande, next him, as they sat down in their saddles with the rest of the "First Life," in front of St. Stephen's, with a hazy fog steaming round them, and a London mob crushing against their chargers' flanks, while Black Douglas stood like a rock, though a butcher's tray was pressed against his withers, a mongrel was snapping at his hocks, and the inevitable apple-woman, of Cecil's prophetic horror, was wildly plunging between his legs, as the hydra-headed rushed down in insane headlong haste to stare at, and crush on to, that superb body of Guards.

"I would give a kingdom for a soda and brandy. Bah! ye gods! what a smell of fish and fustian," sighed Bertie, with a yawn of utter famine for want of something to drink and something to smoke, were it only a glass of brown sherry and a little papelito, while he glanced down at the snow-white and jet-black masterpieces of Rake's genius, all smirched, and splashed, and smeared.

He had given fifty pounds away, and scarcely knew whether he should have enough to take his ticket next day into the Shires, and he owed fifty hundred without having the slightest grounds for supposing he should ever

be able to pay it, and he cared no more about either of these things than he cared about the Zu-Zu's throwing the half-guinea peaches into the river after a Richmond dinner, in the effort to hit dragon-flies with them; but to be half a day without a cigarette, and to have a disagreeable odor of apples and corduroys wafted up to him, was a calamity that made him insupportably depressed and unhappy.

Well, why not? It is the trifles of life that are its bores after all. Most men can meet ruin calmly, for instance, or laugh when they lie in a ditch with their own knee-joint and their hunter's spine broken over the double post and rails: it is the mud that has choked up your horn just when you wanted to rally the pack; it's the county member who catches you by the button in the lobby; it's the whip who carries you off to a division just when you've sat down to your turbot; it's the ten seconds by which you miss the train; it's the dust that gets in your eyes as you go down to Epsom; it's the pretty little rose note that went by accident to your house instead of your club, and raised a storm from Madame; it's the dog that always will run wild into the birds; it's the cook who always will season the white soup wrong,—it is these that are the bores of life, and that try the temper of your philosophy.

An acquaintance of mine told me the other day of having lost heavy sums through a swindler, with as placid an indifference as if he had lost a toothpick; but he swore like a trooper because a thief had stolen the steel-mounted hoof of a dead pet hunter.

"Insufferable!" murmured Cecil, hiding another yawn behind his gauntlet; "the Line's nothing half so bad as this; one day in a London mob beats a year's campaign-

ing; what's charging a pah to charging an oyster-stall, or a parapet of fascines to a bristling row of umbrellas?"

Which question as to the relative hardships of the two Arms was a question of military interest never answered, as Cecil scattered the umbrellas right and left, and dashed from the Houses of Parliament full trot with the rest of the escort on the return to the Palace, the afternoon sun breaking out with a brightened gleam from the clouds, and flashing off the drawn swords, the streaming plumes, the glittering breast-plates, the gold embroideries, and the fretting chargers.

But a mere sun-gleam just when the thing was over, and the escort was pacing back to Hyde Park barracks, could not console Cecil for fog, wind, mud, oyster-vendors, bad odors, and the uproar and riff-raff of the streets: specially when his throat was as dry as a lime-kiln, and his longing for the sight of a cheroot approaching desperation. Unlimited sodas, three pipes smoked silently over Delphine Demirep's last novel, a bath well dashed with eau de cologne, and some glasses of Anisette after the fatigue-duty of unharnessing, restored him a little; but he was still weary and depressed into gentler languor than ever through all the courses at a dinner party at the Austrian Embassy, and did not recover his dejection at a reception of the Duchess of Lydiard-Tregoze, where the prettiest French Countess of her time asked him if anything was the matter.

"Yes!" said Bertie with a sigh, and a profound melancholy in what the women called his handsome Spanish eyes, "I have had a great misfortune; we have been on duty all day!"

He did not thoroughly recover tone, light and careless though his temper was, till the Zu-Zu, in her diamond-edition of a villa, prescribed Crême de Bouzy and Parfait

Amour in succession, with a considerable amount of pine-apple ice at three o'clock in the morning, which restorative prescription succeeded.

Indeed, it took something as tremendous as divorce from all forms of smoking for five hours, to make an impression on Bertie. He had the most serene insouciance that ever a man was blessed with; in worry he did not believe—he never let it come near him; and beyond a little difficulty sometimes in separating too many entangled rose-chains caught round him at the same time, and the annoyance of a miscalculation on the flat, or the ridge-and-furrow, when a Maldon or Danebury favorite came nowhere, or his book was wrong for the Grand National, Cecil had no cares of any sort of description.

True, the Royallieu Peerage, one of the most ancient and almost one of the most impoverished in the kingdom, could ill afford to maintain its sons in the expensive career on which it had launched them, and the chief there was to spare usually went between the eldest son, a Secretary of Legation in that costly and charming City of Vienna, and to the young one, Berkeley, through the old Viscount's partiality, so that, had Bertie ever gone so far as to study his actual position, he would have probably confessed that it was, to say the least, awkward; but then he never did this, certainly never did in thoroughly. Sometimes he felt himself near the wind when settling-day came, or the Jews appeared utterly impracticable; but as a rule, things had always trimmed *somehow*, and though his debts were considerable, and he was literally as penniless as man can be to stay in the Guards at all, he had never in any shape realised the want of money. He might not be able to raise a guinea to go toward that long-standing account, his army tailor's bill, and post obits had long ago forestalled the few hundreds a year

that, under his mother's settlements, would come to him at the Viscount's death; but Cecil had never known in his life what it was not to have a first-rate stud, not to live as luxuriously as a duke, not to order the costliest dinners at the clubs, and be among the first to lead all the splendid entertainments and extravagancies of the Household; he had never been without his Highland shooting, his Baden gaming, his prize-winning schooner, among the R. V. Y. Squadron, his September battues his Pytchley hunting, his pretty expensive Zu-Zus and other toys, his drag for Epsom, and his trap and hack for the Park, his crowd of engagements through the season, and his bevy of fair leaders of the fashion to smile on him, and shower their invitation-cards on him, like a rain of rose-leaves, as one of their "best men."

"Best," that is, in the sense of fashion, flirting, waltzing, and general social distinction; in no other sense, for the newest of débutantes knew well that "Beauty," though the most perfect of flirts, would never be "serious," and had nothing to be serious with, on which understanding he was allowed by the sex to have the run of their boudoirs and drawing-rooms, much as if he were a little lion-dog; they counted him quite "safe;" he made love to the married women, to be sure, but he was quite certain not to run away with the marriageable daughters.

Hence, Bertie had never felt the want of all that is bought by and represents money, and imbibed a vague, indistinct impression that all these things that made life pleasant came by Nature, and were the natural inheritance and concomitants of anybody born in a decent station, and endowed with a tolerable tact; such a matter-of-fact difficulty as not having gold enough to pay for his own and his stud's transit to the Shires had very rarely stared

him in the face, and when it did he trusted to chance to lift him safely over such a social "yawner," and rarely trusted in vain.

According to all the canons of his Order he was never excited, never disappointed, never exhilarated, never disturbed, and also of course never by any chance embarrassed. "*Votre imperturbabilité*," as the Prince de Ligne used to designate La Grande Catherine, would have been an admirable designation for Cecil; he was imperturbable under everything; even when an heiress, with feet as colossal as her fortune, made him a proposal of marriage, and he had to retreat from all the offered honors and threatened horrors, he courteously, but steadily declined them. Nor in more interesting adventures was he less happy in his coolness. When my Lord Regalia, who never knew when he was not wanted, came in inopportunely in a very tender scene of the young Guardsman's (then but a Cornet) with his handsome Countess, Cecil lifted his long lashes lazily, turning to him a face of the most *plaît-il?* and innocent demureness—or consummate impudence, whichever you like. "We're playing Solitaire. Interesting game. Queer fix, though, the ball's in that's left all alone in the middle, don't you think?" Lord Regalia felt his own similarity to the "ball in a fix" too keenly to appreciate the interesting character of the amusement, or the coolness of the chief performer in it: but "Beauty's Solitaire" became a synonym thenceforth among the Household to typify any very tender passages "*sotto quattr' occhi.*"

This made his reputation on the town; the ladies called it very wicked, but were charmed by the Richelieu-like impudence all the same, and petted the sinner; and from then till now he had held his own with them; dashing through life very fast, as became the first riding

man in the Brigades, but enjoying it very fully, smoothly and softly, liking the world and being liked by it.

To be sure, in the background there was always that ogre of money, and the beast had a knack of gnawing bigger and darker every year; but then, on the other hand, Cecil never looked at him—never thought about him—knew, too, that he stood just as much behind the chairs of men whom the world accredited as millionaires, and whenever the ogre gave him a cold grip, that there was for the moment no escaping, washed away the touch of it in a warm fresh draft of pleasure.

CHAPTER II.

The Loose Box, and the Tabagie.

"How long before the French can come up?" asked Wellington, hearing of the pursuit that was thundering close on his rear in the most critical hours of the short, sultry Spanish night. "Half an hour, at least," was the answer. "Very well, then, I will turn in and get some sleep," said the Commander-in-Chief, rolling himself in a cloak, and lying down in a ditch to rest as soundly for the single half hour as any tired drummer-boy.

Serenely as Wellington, another hero slept profoundly, on the eve of a great event—of a great contest to be met when the day should break—of a critical victory, depending on him alone to save the Guards of England from defeat and shame; their honor and their hopes rested on his solitary head; by him they would be lost or saved; but, unharassed by the magnitude of the stake at issue, unhaunted by the past, unfretted by the future, he slumbered the slumber of the just.

Not Sir Tristram, Sir Caledore, Sir Launcelot, no, nor Arthur himself, was ever truer knight, was ever gentler,

braver, bolder, more stanch of heart, more loyal of soul, than he to whom the glory of the Brigades was trusted now; never was there spirit more dauntless and fiery in the field, never temper kindlier and more generous with friends and foes. Miles of the ridge and furrow, stiff fences of terrible blackthorn, double posts and rails, yawners and croppers both, tough as Shire and Stewards could make them, awaited him on the morrow; on his beautiful lean head capfuls of money were piled by the Service and the Talent; and in his stride all the fame of the Household would be centred on the morrow; but he took his rest like the cracker he was—standing as though he were on guard, and steady as a rock, a hero every inch of him. For he was Forest King, the great steeple-chaser, on whom the Guards had laid all their money for the Grand Military—the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon.

His quarters were a loose box, his camp-bed a litter of straw, fresh shaken down, his clothing a very handsome rug, hood, and quarter-piece buckled on and marked "B. C.;" above the manger and the door was lettered his own name in gold, "Forest King;" and in the panels of the latter were miniatures of his sire and of his dam: Lord of the Isles, one of the greatest hunters that the grass countries ever saw sent across them; and Bayadere, a wild-pigeon-blue mare of Circassia. How, furthermore, he stretched up to his long line of ancestry by the Sovereign, out of Queen of Roses; by Belted Earl, out of Fallen Star; by Marmion, out of Court Coquette, and straight up to the White Cockade blood, etc. etc. etc., is it not written in the mighty and immortal chronicle, precious as the Koran, patrician as the Peerage, known and beloved to mortals as the "Stud Book?"

Not an immensely large, or unusually powerful horse, but with *race* in every line of him; steel-grey in color,

darkening well at all points, shining and soft as satin, with the firm muscles quivering beneath at the first touch of excitement to the high mettle and finely-strung organization; the head small, lean, racer-like, "blood" all over; with the delicate taper ears, almost transparent in full light; well ribbed-up, fine shoulders, admirable girth and loins; legs clean, slender, firm, promising splendid knee action; sixteen hands high, and up to thirteen stone; clever enough for anything, trained to close and open country, a perfect brook jumper, a clipper at fencing, taking a great deal of riding, as any one could tell by the set-on of his neck, but docile as a child to a well-known hand—such was Forest King with his English and Eastern strains, winner at Chertsey, Croydon, the National, the Granby, the Belvoir Castle, the Curragh, and all the gentleman-rider steeple-chases and military sweepstakes in the kingdom, and entered now, with tremendous bets on him, for the Gilt Vase.

It was a crisp, cold night outside, starry, and wintry, but open weather, and clear; the ground would be just right on the morrow, neither hard as the slate of a billiard-table, nor wet as the slush of a quagmire. Forest King slept steadily on in his warm and spacious box, dreaming doubtless of days of victory, club-hunting in the reedy October woods and pastures, of the ringing notes of the horn, and the sweet music of the pack, and the glorious quick burst up-wind, breasting the icy cold water, and showing the way over fence and bullfinch. Dozing and dreaming pleasantly; but alert for all that; for he awoke suddenly, shook himself, had a hilarious roll in the straw, and stood "at attention."

Awake only, could you tell the generous and gallant promise of his perfect temper; for there are no eyes that speak more truly, none on earth that are so beautiful, as

the eyes of a horse. Forest King's were dark as a gazelle's, soft as a woman's, brilliant as stars, a little dreamy and mournful, and as infinitely caressing when he looked at what he loved, as they could blaze full of light and fire when danger was near and rivalry against him. How loyally such eyes have looked at me over the paddock fence, as a wild happy gallop was suddenly broken for a gentle head to be softly pushed against my hand with the gentlest of welcomes! They sadly put to shame the million human eyes that so fast learn the lie of the world, and utter it as falsely as the lips.

The steeple-chaser stood alert, every fibre of his body strung to pleasurable excitation; the door opened, a hand held him some sugar, and the voice he loved best said fondly, "All right, old boy?"

Forest King devoured the beloved dainty with true equine unction, rubbed his forehead against his master's shoulder, and pushed his nose into the nearest pocket in search for more of his sweetmeat.

"You'd eat a sugar-loaf, you dear old rascal. Put the gas up, George," said his owner, while he turned up the body clothing to feel the firm, cool skin, loosened one of the bandages, passed his hand from thigh to fetlock, and glanced round the box to be sure the horse had been well suppered and littered down.

"Think we shall win, Rake?"

Rake, with a stable lantern in his hand and a forage cap on one side of his head, standing a little in advance of a group of grooms and helpers, took a bit of straw out of his mouth, and smiled a smile of sublime scorn and security. "*Win, sir?* I should be glad to know as when was that ere King ever beat yet, or you either, sir, for that matter?"

Bertie Cecil laughed a little languidly.

"Well, we take a good deal of beating, I think, and there are not very many who can give it us; are there, old fellow?" he said to the horse, as he passed his palm over the withers; "but there are some crushers in the lot to-morrow; you'll have to do all you know."

Forest King caught the manger with his teeth, and kicked in a bit of play and ate some more sugar, with much licking of his lips to express the monchalance with which *he* viewed his share in the contest, and his tranquil certainty of being first past the flags. His master looked at him once more and sauntered out of the box.

"He's in first-rate form, Rake, and right as a trivet."

"In course he is, sir; nobody ever laid leg over such cattle as all that White Cockade blood, and he's the very best of the strain," said Rake, as he held up his lantern across the stable-yard, that looked doubly dark in the February night after the bright gas glare of the box.

"So he need be," thought Cecil, as a bull terrier, three or four Gordon setters, and Alpine mastiff, and two wiry Skyes dashed at their chains, giving tongue in frantic delight at the sound of his step, while the hounds echoed the welcome from their more distant kennels, and he went slowly across the great stone yard, with the end of a huge cheroot glimmering through the gloom. "So he need be to pull *me* through. The Ducal and the October let me in for it enough; I never was closer in my life. The deuce if I don't do the distance to-morrow I sha'n't have sovereigns enough to play pound-points at night! *I* don't know what a man's to do; if he's put into this life he must go the pace of it. Why did Royal send me into the Guards, if he meant to keep the screw on in this way; he'd better have drafted me into a marching regiment at once, if he wanted me to live upon nothing."

Nothing meant anything under 6000*l.* a year with Cecil, as the minimum of monetary necessities in this world, and a look of genuine annoyance and trouble, most unusual there, was on his face, the picture of carelessness and gentle indifference habitually, though shadowed now as he crossed the court-yard after his after-midnight visit to his steeplechaser. He had backed Forest King heavily, and stood to win or lose a cracker on his own riding on the morrow; and, though he had found sufficient to bring him into the Shires, he had barely enough lying on his dressing-table, up in the bachelor suite within, to pay his groom's book, or a notion where to get more, if the King should find his match, over the ridge and furrow in the morning!

It was not pleasant: a cynical, savage world-disgusted Timon derives on the whole a good amount of satisfaction from his break-down in the fine philippics against his contemporaries that it is certain to afford, and the magnificent grievances with which it furnishes him; but when life is very pleasant to a man, and the world very fond of him; when existence is perfectly smooth,—bar that single pressure of money,—and is an incessantly changing kaleidoscope of London seasons, Paris winters, ducal houses in the hunting months, dinners at the Pall Mall Clubs, dinners at the Star and Garter, dinners irreproachable everywhere, cottage for Ascot week, yachting with the R. V. Y. Club, Derby handicaps at Hornsey, pretty chorus-singers set up in Bijou villas, dashing rosières taken over to Baden, warm corners in Belvoir, Savernake, and Longeat battues, and all the rest of the general programme, with no drawback to it, except the duties at the Palace, the heat of a review, or the extravagance of a pampered lionne—*then* to be pulled up in that easy swinging gallop for sheer want of a golden

shoe, as one may say, is abominably bitter, and requires far more philosophy to endure than Timon would ever manage to muster. It is a bore, an unmitigated bore, a harsh, hateful, unrelieved martyrdom that the world does not see, and that the world would not pity if it did.

"Never mind! Things will come right. Forest King never failed me yet; he is as full of running as a Derby winner, and he'll go over the yawners like a bird," thought Cecil, who never confronted his troubles with more than sixty seconds' thought, and who was of that light, impassable, half-levity, half-languor of temperament that both throws off worry easily, and shirks it persistently. "Sufficient for the day," etc., was the essence of his creed; and if he had enough to lay a fiver at night on the rubber, he was quite able to forget for the time that he wanted five hundred for settling-day in the morning, and had not an idea how to get it. There was not a trace of anxiety on him, when he opened a low arched door, passed down a corridor, and entered the warm, full light of that chamber of liberty, that sanctuary of the persecuted, that temple of refuge, thrice blessed in all its forms throughout the land, that consecrated Mecca of every true believer in the divinity of the meerschaum, and the paradise of the narghille,—the smoking-room.

A spacious easy chamber, too, lined with the laziest of divans, seen just now through a fog of smoke, and tenanted by nearly a score of men in every imaginable loose velvet costume, and with faces as well known in the Park at six o'clock in May, and on the Heath in October, in Paris in January, and on the Solent in August, in Pratt's of a summer's night, and on the Moors in an autumn morning, as though they were features that came round as regularly as the "July" or the Waterloo

Cup. Some were puffing away in calm meditative comfort, in silence that they would not have broken for any earthly consideration; others were talking hard and fast, and through the air heavily weighted with the varieties of tobacco, from tiny cigarettes to giant cheroots, from rough bowls full of cavendish to sybaritic rose-water hookahs, a Babel of sentences rose together:—"Gave him too much riding, the idiot." "Take the field, bar one." "Nothing so good for the mare as a little nitre and antimony in her mash." "Not at all! the Regent and Rake cross in the old strain, always was black-tan with a white frill." "The Earl's as good a fellow as Lady Flora, always give you a mount." "Nothing like a Kate Terry though on a bright day for salmon." "Faster thing I never knew; found at twenty minutes past eleven, and killed just beyond Longdown Water at ten to twelve." All these various phrases were rushing in among each other, and tossed across the eddies of smoke in the conflicting of tongues loosened in the *tabagie* and made eloquent, though slightly inarticulate, by pipe-stems; while a tall, fair man, with the limbs of a Hercules, the chest of a prize-fighter, and the face of a Raphael Angel known in the Household as Seraph, was in the full flood of a story of whist played under difficulties in the Doncaster express.

"I wanted a monkey; I wanted monkeys awfully," he was stating as Forest King's owner came into the smoking-room.

"Did you, Seraph? The 'Zoo' or the Clubs could supply you with apes fully developed to any amount," said Bertie, as he threw himself down.

"You be hanged!" laughed the Seraph, known to the rest of the world as the Marquis of Rockingham, son of the Duke of Lyonnesse. "I wished monkeys, but

the others wished ponies and hundreds, so I gave in; Vandebur and I won two rubbers, and we'd just begun the third when the train stopped with a crash; none of us dropped the cards though, but the tricks and the scores all went down with the shaking. 'Can't play in that row,' said Charlie, for the women were shrieking like mad, and the engine was roaring like my mare Philippa —I'm afraid she'll never be cured, poor thing!—so I put my head out and asked what was up? We'd run into a cattle train. Anybody hurt? No, nobody hurt; but we were to get out. 'I'll be shot if I get out,' I told 'em, 'till I've finished the rubber.' 'But you must get out,' said the guard; 'carriages must be moved.' 'Nobody says "must" to him' said Van (he'd drank more Perles du Rhin than was good for him at Doncaster); 'don't you know the Seraph?' Man stared. 'Yes, sir, know the Seraph, sir; leastways, did, sir, afore he died; see him once at Moulsey Mill, sir; his "one two" was amazin'. Waters soon threw up the sponge.' We were all dying with laughter, and I tossed him a tenner. 'There, my good fellow,' said I, 'shunt the carriage and let us finish the game. If another train come up, give it Lord Rockingham's compliments and say he'll thank it to stop, because collisions shake his trumps together.' Man thought us mad, took tenner though, shunted us to one side out of the noise, and we played two rubbers more before they'd repaired the damage and sent us on to town."

And the Seraph took a long-drawn whiff from his silver meerschaum, and then a deep draught of soda and brandy to refresh himself after the narrative;—biggest, best tempered, and wildest of men in or out of the Service, despite the angelic character of his fair-haired head, and blue eyes that looked as clear and as innocent as those of a six-year old child.

"Not the first time by a good many that you've 'shunted off the straight,' Seraph?" laughed Cecil, substituting an amber mouth-piece for his half-finished cheroot. "I've been having a good-night look at the King. He'll stay."

"Of course he will," chorused half a dozen voices.

"With all our pots on him," added the Seraph. "He's too much of a gentleman to put us all up a tree; he knows he carries the honor of the Household."

"There are some good mounts, there's no denying that," said Chesterfield of the Blues (who was called Tom for no other reason than that it was entirely unlike his real name of Adolphus), where he was curled up almost invisible, except for the movement of the jasmine stick of his chibouque. "That brute, Day Star, is a splendid fencer, and for a brook jumper, it would be hard to beat Wild Geranium, though her shoulders are not quite what they ought to be. Montecute, too, can ride a good thing, and he's got one in Pas de Charge."

"I'm not much afraid of Monti, he makes too wild a burst first; he never *saves* one atom," yawned Cecil, with the coils of his hookah bubbling among the rose-water; "the man I'm afraid of is that fellow from the Tenth; he's as light as a feather and as hard as steel. I watched him yesterday going over the water, and the horse he'll ride for Trelawney is good enough to beat even the King if he's properly piloted."

"You haven't kept yourself in condition, Beauty," growled "Tom," with the chibouque in his mouth, "else nothing could give you the go-by. It's tempting Providence to go in for the Gilt Vase after such a December and January as you spent in Paris. Even the week you've been in the Shires you haven't trained a bit; you've been waltzing or playing baccarât till five in the morn-

ing, and taking no end of sodas after to bring you right for the meet at nine. If a man will drink champagnes and burgundies as you do, and spend his time after women, I should like to know how he's to be in hard riding condition, unless he expects a miracle."

With which Chesterfield, who weighed fourteen stone himself, and was, therefore, out of all but welter-races, and wanted a weight carrier of tremendous power even for them, subsided under a heap of velvet and cashmere, and Cecil laughed: lying on a divan just under one of the gas branches, the light fell full on his handsome face, with its fair hue and its gentle languor on which there was not a single trace of the *outrecuidance* attributed to him. Both he and the Seraph could lead the wildest life of any men in Europe without looking one shadow more worn than the brightest beauty of the season, and could hold wassail in riotous rivalry till the sun rose, and then throw themselves into saddle as fresh as if they had been sound asleep all night, to keep up with the pack the whole day in a fast burst or on a cold scent, or in whatever sport Fortune and the coverts gave them, till their second horses wound their way homeward through muddy, leafless lanes, when the stars had risen.

"Beauty don't believe in training. No more do I. Never would train for anything," said the Seraph, now, pulling the long blonde moustaches that were not altogether in character with his seraphic cognomen. "If a man can ride, let him. If he's born to the pig-skin he'll be in at the distance safe enough, whether he smoke or don't smoke, drink or don't drink. As for training on raw chops, giving up wine, living like the very deuce, and all as if you were in a monastery, and changing yourself into a mere bag of bones—it's utter bosh. You

might as well be in purgatory; besides, it's no more credit to win then than if you were a professional."

"But you must have trained at Christ Church, Rock, for the Eight?" asked another Guardsman, Sir Vere Bellingham, "Severe," as he was christened, chiefly because he was the easiest-going giant in existence.

"Did I! men came to me; wanted me to join the Eight; coxswain came, awful strict little fellow, docked his men of all their fun—took plenty himself though! Coxswain said I must begin to train, do as all his crew did. I threw up my sleeve and showed him my arm;" and the Seraph stretched out an arm magnificent enough for a statue of Milo. "I said, there, sir, I'll help you thrash Cambridge, if you like, but train I *won't* for you or for all the University. I've been Captain of the Eton Eight; but I didn't keep my crew on tea and toast. I fattened 'em regularly three times a week on venison and champagne at Christopher's. Very happy to feed yours, too, if you like, game comes down to me every Friday from the Duke's moors; they look uncommonly as if they wanted it! You should have seen his face!—fatten the Eight! He didn't let me do that of course; but he was very glad of my oar in his rowlocks, and I helped him beat Cambridge without training an hour myself, except so far as rowing hard went."

And the Marquis of Rockingham, made thirsty by the recollection, dipped his fair moustaches into a foaming seltzer.

"Quite right, Seraph!" said Cecil, "when a man comes up to the weights, looking like a homonunculus after he's been getting every atom of flesh off him like a jockey, he ought to be struck out for the stakes to my mind. 'Tisn't a question of riding, then, nor yet of pluck, or of management; it's nothing but a question

of pounds, and of who can stand the tamest life the longest."

"Well, beneficial for one's morals, at any rate," suggested Sir Vere.

"Morals be hanged," said Bertie, very immorally. "I'm glad *you* remind us of them, Vere, you're such a quintessence of decorum and respectability yourself! I say—anybody know anything of this fellow of the Tenth that's to ride Trelawney's chestnut?"

"Jimmy Delmar! Oh, yes; I know Jimmy," answered Lord Cosmo Wentworth, of the Scots Fusileers, from the far depths of an arm-chair. "Knew him at Aldershot. Fine rider; give you a good bit of trouble, Beauty. Hasn't been in England for years; troop been such a while at Calcutta. The Fancy take to him rather; offering very freely on him this morning in the Village; and he's got a rare good thing in the chestnut."

"Not a doubt of it. The White Lily blood, out of that Irish mare D'Orleans Diamonds too."

"Never mind! Tenth won't beat *us*. The Household will win safe enough, unless Forest King goes and breaks his back over Brixworth—eh, Beauty?" said the Seraph, who believed devoutly in his comrade, with all the loving loyalty characteristic of the House of Lyonnesse, that to monarchs and to friends had often cost it very dear.

"You put your faith in the wrong quarter, Rock; I *may* fail you, *he* never will," said Cecil, with ever so slight a dash of sadness in his words; the thought crossed him of how boldly, how straightly, how gallantly the horse always breasted and conquered his difficulties—did he himself deal half so well with his own?

"Well! you both of you carry all our money and all our credit; so for the fair fame of the Household do 'all

you know.' I haven't hedged a shilling, not laid off a farthing, Bertie; I stand on you and the King, and nothing else—see what a sublime faith I have in you."

"I don't think you're wise then, Seraph; the field will be very strong," said Cecil, languidly. The answer was indifferent, and certainly thankless; but under his drooped lids a glance, frank and warm, rested for the moment on the Seraph's leonine strength and Raphaelesque head; it was not his way to say it, or to show it, or even much to think it; but in his heart he loved his old friend wonderfully well.

And they talked on of little else than of the great steeple-chase of the Service, for the next hour in the Tâbak-Parliament, while the great clouds of scented smoke circled heavily round, making a halo of Turkish above the gold locks of the Titanic Seraph, steeping Chesterfield's velvets in strong odors of Cavendish, and drifting a light rose-scented mist over Bertie's long lithe limbs, light enough and skilled enough to disdain all "training for the weights."

"*That's* not the way to be in condition," growled "Tom," getting up with a great shake as the clock clanged the strokes of five; they had only returned from a ball three miles off, when Cecil had paid his visit to the loose box. Bertie laughed; his laugh was like himself, rather languid but very light-hearted, very silvery, very engaging.

"Sit and smoke till breakfast time if you like, Tom, it won't make any difference to *me*."

But the Smoke Parliament wouldn't hear of the champion of the Household over the ridge and furrow, risking the steadiness of his wrist and the keenness of his eye, by any such additional tempting of Providence, and went off itself in various directions, with good-night

iced drinks, yawning considerably, like most other parliaments after a sitting.

It was the old family place of the Royallieu House in which he had congregated half the Guardsmen in the Service for the great event, and consequently the bachelor chambers in it were of the utmost comfort and spaciousness, and when Cecil sauntered into his old quarters, familiar from boyhood, he could not have been better off in his own luxurious haunts in Piccadilly. Moreover, the first thing that caught his eye was a dainty scarlet silk riding jacket broidered in gold and silver, with the motto of his house, "Cœur Vaillant se fait Royaume," all circled with oak and laurel leaves on the collar.

It was the work of very fair hands, of very aristocratic hands, and he looked at it with a smile. "Ah, my lady, my lady!" he thought half aloud, "do you really love me? Do I really love you?"

There was a laugh in his eyes as he asked himself what might be termed an interesting question; then something more earnest came over his face, and he stood a second with the pretty costly embroideries in his hand, with a smile that was almost tender, though it was still much more amused. "I suppose we do," he concluded at last, "at least quite as much as is ever worth while. Passions don't do for the drawing-room, as somebody says in 'Coningsby;' besides,—I would not feel a strong emotion for the universe. Bad style always, and more detrimental to 'condition,' as Tom would say, than three bottles of brandy!"

He was so little near what he dreaded, at present at least, that the scarlet jacket was tossed down again, and gave him no dreams of its fair and titled embroideress. He looked out, the last thing, at some ominous clouds

drifting heavily up before the dawn, and the state of the weather, and the chance of its being rainy, filled his thoughts, to the utter exclusion of the donor of that bright gold-laden dainty gift. "I hope to goodness there won't be any drenching shower. Forest King can stand ground as hard as a slate, but if there's one thing he's weak in it's slush!" was Bertie's last conscious thought, as he stretched his limbs out and fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER III.

The Soldiers' Blue Ribbon.

"TAKE the Field bar one." "Two to one on Forest King." "Two to one on Bay Regent." "Fourteen to seven on Wild Geranium." "Seven to two against Brother to Fairy." "Three to five on Pas de Charge." "Nineteen to six on Day Star." "Take the Field bar one," rose above the hoarse tumultuous roar of the Ring on the clear, crisp, sunny morning that was shining on the Shires on the day of the famous steeple-chase.

The talent had come in great muster from London; the great bookmakers were there with their stentor lungs and their quiet, quick entry of thousands; and the din and the turmoil, at the tiptop of their height, were more like a gathering on the Heath or before the Red House, than the local throngs that usually mark steeple-chase meetings, even when they be the Grand Military or the Grand National. There were keen excitement and heavy stakes on the present event; the betting had never stood still a second in Town or the Shires; and even the "knowing ones," the worshippers of the "flat" alone, the professionals who ran down gentlemen races, and the hypercritics who affirmed that there is not such a thing as a steeple-chaser to be found on earth (since, to be a

fencer, a water-jumper, *and* a racer, were to attain an equine perfection impossible on earth, whatever it may be in "happy hunting ground" of immortality), even these, one and all of them, came eager to see the running for the Gilt Vase.

For it was known very well that the Guards had backed their horse tremendously, and the county laid most of its money on him, and the bookmakers were shy of laying off much against one of the first cross-country riders of the Service, who had landed his mount at the Grand National Handicap, the Billesdon Coplow, the Ealing, the Curragh, the Prix du Donjon, the Rastatt, and almost every other for which he had entered. Yet, despite this, the "Fancy" took most to Bay Regent; they thought he would cut the work out; his sire had won the Champagne Stakes at Doncaster, and the Drawing-room at "glorious Goodwood," and that racing strain through the White Lily blood, coupled with a magnificent reputation which he brought from Leicestershire as a fencer, found him chief favour among the fraternity.

His jockey, Jimmy Delmar, too, with his bronzed, muscular, sinewy frame, his low stature, his light weight, his sunburnt, acute face, and a way of carrying his hands as he rode that was precisely like Aldcroft's, looked a hundred times more professional than the brilliance of "Beauty," and the reckless dash of his well-known way of "sending the horse along with all he had in him," which was undeniably much more like a fast kill over the Melton country, than like a weight-for-age race anywhere. "You see the Service in his *stirrups*," said an old nobbler who had watched many a trial spin, lying hidden in a ditch or a drain; and indisputably you did: Bertie's riding was superb, but it was still the riding of a cavalry man, not of a jockey. The mere turn of the

foot in the stirrups told it as the old man had the shrewdness to know.

So the King went down at one time two points in the morning betting.

"Know them flash cracks of the Household," said Tim Varnet, as sharp a little Leg as ever "got on" a dark thing, and "went halves" with a jock who consented to rope a favorite at the Ducal. "Them swells, ye see, they give any money for blood. They just go by Godolphin heads, and little feet, and winners' strains, and all the rest of it; and so long as they get pedigree never look at substance; and their bone comes no bigger than a deer's. Now, it's *force* as well as pace that tells over a bit of plow; a critter that would win the Derby on the flat would knock up over the first spin over the clods; and that King's legs are too light for my fancy, 'andsome as 'tis ondeniable he looks—for a little 'un as one may say."

And Tim Varnest exactly expressed the dominant mistrust of the talent; despite all his race and all his exploits, the King was not popular in the Ring, because he was like his backers—"a swell." They thought him "showy—very showy," "a picture to frame," "a lustre to look at;" but they disbelieved in him, almost to a man, as a *stayer*, and they trusted him scarcely at all with their money.

"It's plain that he's 'meant,' though," thought little Tim, who was so used to the "shady" in stable matters, that he could hardly persuade himself that even the Grand Military could be run fair, and would have thought a Guardsman or a Hussar only exercised his just privilege as a jockey in "roping" after selling the race, if so it suited his book. "He's 'meant,' that's clear, 'cause the swells have put all their pots on him—but if the pots

don't bile over, strike me a loser!" a contingency he knew he might very well invoke, his investments being invariably so matchlessly arranged, that let what would be "bowled over," Tim Varnet never could be.

Whatever the King might prove, however, the Guards, the Flower of the Service, must stand or fall by him; *they had not another horse entered*, so complete was the trust that, like the Seraph, they put in "Beauty" and his gray. But there was no doubt as to the tremendousness of the struggle lying before him. The running ground covered four miles and a half, and had forty-two jumps in it, exclusive of the famous Brixworth: half was grass-land, and half ridge and furrow; a lane with very awkward double fences laced in and in with the memorable blackthorn, a laid hedge with thick growers in it, and many another "teaser," coupled with the yawning water, made the course a severe one; while thirty-two starters of unusual excellence gave a good field and promised a close race. *Every fine bit of steeple-chase blood that was to be found in their studs, the Service had brought together for the great event;* and if the question could ever be solved, whether it is possible to find a strain that shall combine pace over the flat, with the heart to stay over an inclosed country, the speed to race, with the bottom to fence and the force to clear water, it seemed likely to be settled now. The Service and the Stable had done their uttermost to reach its solution.

The clock of the course pointed to half-past one; the saddling bell would ring at a quarter to two, for the days were short and darkened early; the Stewards were all arrived, except the Marquis of Rockingham, and the Ring was in the full rush of excitement, some "getting on" hurriedly to make up for lost time, some "peppering" one or other of the favorites hotly, some laying off

their moneys in a cold fit of caution, some putting capfuls on the King, or Bay Regent, or Pas de Charge, without hedging a shilling. The London talent, the agents from the great commission stables, the local betting men, the shrewd wiseacres from the Ridings, all the rest of the brotherhood of the Turf were crowding together with the deafening shouting common to them which sounds so tumultuous, so insane, and so unintelligible to outsiders. Amid them half the titled heads of England, all the great names known on the flat, and men in the Guards, men in the Rifles, men in the Light Cavalry, men in the Heavies, men in the Scots Greys, men in the Horse Artillery, men in all the Arms and all the Regiments that had sent their first riders to try for the Blue Ribbon, were backing their horses with crackers, and jotting down figure after figure, with jewelled pencils, in dainty books, taking long odds with the fielders. Carriages were standing in long lines along the course, the stands were filled with almost as bright a bevy of fashionable loveliness as the Ducal brings together under the park trees of Goodwood; the horses were being led into the inclosure for saddling, a brilliant sun shone for the nonce on the freshest of February noons; beautiful women were fluttering out of their barouches in furs and velvets, wearing the colors of the jockey they favored, and more predominant than any were Cecil's scarlet and white, only rivalled in prominence by the azure of the Heavy Cavalry champion, Sir Eyre Montacute. A drag with four bays—with fine hunting points about them—had dashed up, late of course; the Seraph had swung himself from the roller-bolt into the saddle of his hack (one of those few rare hacks that are *perfect*, and combine every excellence of pace, bone, and action, under their modest appellative), and had cantered off to join the

Stewards, while Cecil had gone up to a group of ladies in the Grand Stand, as if he had no more to do with the morning's business than they. Right in front of that Stand was an artificial bullfinch that promised to treat most of the field to a "purler," a deep ditch dug and filled with water, with two towering black-thorn fences on either side of it, as awkward a leap as the most cramped country ever showed; some were complaining of it; it was too severe, it was unfair, it would break the back of every horse sent at it. The other Stewards were not unwilling to have it tamed down a little, but the Seraph, generally the easiest of all sweet-tempered creatures, refused resolutely to let it be touched.

"Look here," said he confidentially, as he wheeled his hack round to the Stand and beckoned Cecil down, "look here, Beauty, they're wanting to alter that teaser, make it less awkward you know, but I wouldn't because I thought it would look as if I lessened it for *you* you know. Still it *is* a cracker and no mistake; Brixworth itself is nothing to it, and if you'd like it toned down I'll let them do it?——"

"My dear Seraph, not for worlds! You were quite right not to have a thorn taken out. Why *that's* where I shall thrash Bay Regent," said Bertie serenely, as if the winning of the stakes had been forecast in his horoscope.

The Seraph whistled, stroking his moustaches. "Between ourselves, Cecil, that fellow is going up no end. The Talent fancy him so——"

"Let them," said Cecil placidly, with a great cheroot in his mouth, lounging into the centre of the Ring to hear how the betting went on his own mount, perfectly regardless that he would keep them waiting at the weights while he dressed. Everybody there knew him by name and sight; and eager glances followed the tall form of

the Guards' Champion as he moved through the press, in a loose brown sealskin coat, with a little strip of scarlet ribbon round his throat, nodding to this peer, taking evens with that, exchanging a whisper with a Duke, and squaring his book with a Jew. Murmurs followed about him as if he were the horse himself—"looks in racing form"—"looks used up to *me*" —"too little hands sure*ly* to hold in long in a spin"—"too much length in the limbs for a light weight, bone's always awfully heavy"—"dark under the eye, been going too fast for trainin'"—"a swell all over, but rides no end," with other innumerable contradictory phrases according as the speaker was "on" him or against him buzzed about him from the riff-raff of the Ring, in no way disturbing his serene equanimity.

One man, a big fellow, "ossy" all over, with the genuine sporting cut-away coat, and a superabundance of showy necktie and bad jewelry, eyed him curiously, and slightly turned so that his back was toward Bertie, as the latter was entering a bet with another Guardsman well known on the turf, and he himself was taking long odds with little Berk Cecil, the boy having betted on his brother's riding, as though he had the Bank of England at his back. Indeed, save that the lad had the hereditary Royallieu instinct of extravagance, and, with a half thoughtless, half wilful improvidence, piled debt and difficulties on his rather brainless and boyish head, he had much more to depend on than his elder; old Lord Royallieu doted on him, spoilt him, and denied him nothing, though himself a stern, austere, passionate man, made irascible by ill health, and, in his fits of anger, a very terrible personage indeed, no more to be conciliated by persuasion than iron is to be bent by the hand; so terrible, that even his pet dreaded him mortally, and came to Bertie

to get his imprudences and peccadilloes covered from the Viscount's sight.

Glancing round at this moment as he stood in the Ring, Cecil saw the betting man with whom Berkeley was taking long odds on the race; he raised his eyebrows, and his face darkened for a second, though resuming his habitual listless serenity almost immediately.

"You remember that case of welching after the Ebor St. Leger, Con?" he said in a low tone to the Earl of Constantia, with whom he was talking. The Earl nodded assent; every one had heard of it, and a very flagrant case it was.

"There's the fellow," said Cecil, laconically, and strode toward him with his long, lounging cavalry swing. The man turned pallid under his florid skin, and tried to edge imperceptibly away; but the density of the throng prevented his moving quickly enough to evade Cecil, who stooped his head, and said a word in his ear. It was briefly:

"Leave the ring."

The rascal, half bully, half coward, rallied from the startled fear into which his first recognition by the Guardsman (who had been the chief witness against him in a very scandalous matter at York, and who had warned him that if he ever saw him again in the Ring he would have him turned out of it) had thrown him, and, relying on insolence and the numbers of his fraternity to back him out of it, stood his ground.

"I've as much right here as you swells," he said, with a hoarse laugh. "Are you the whole Jockey Club, that you come it to a honest gentleman like that?"

Cecil looked down on him slightly amused, immeasurably disgusted;—of all earth's terrors, there was not one so great for him as a scene, and the eager bloodshot

eyes of the Ring were turning on them by the thousand, and the loud shouting of the bookmakers was thundering out, "What's up?"

"My 'honest gentleman,'" he said, wearily, "leave this, I tell you; do you hear?"

"Make me!" retorted the "Welcher," defiant in his stout-built square strength, and ready to brazen the matter out. "Make me, my cock o' fine feathers! Put me out of the ring if you can, Mr. Dainty Limbs! I've as much business here as you."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, before, light as a deer and close as steel, Cecil's hand was on his collar, and without any seeming effort, without the slightest passion, he calmly lifted him off the ground, as though he were a terrier, and thrust him through the throng; Ben Davis, as the Welcher was named, meantime being so amazed at such unlooked-for might in the grasp of the gentlest, idlest, most gracefully made, and indolently tempered of his born foes and prey, "the swells," that he let himself be forced along backward in sheer passive paralysis of astonishment, while Bertie, profoundly insensible to the tumult that began to rise and roar about him, from those who were not too absorbed in the business of the morning to note what took place, thrust him along in the single clasp of his right hand outward to where the running ground swept past the Stand, and threw him lightly, easily, just as one may throw a lap-dog to take his bath, into the artifical ditch filled with water that the Seraph had pointed out as "a teaser." The man fell unhurt, unbruised, so gently was he dropped on his back among the muddy, chilly water, and the overhanging brambles; and, as he rose from the ducking, a shudder of ferocious and filthy oaths poured from his lips, increased tenfold by the uproarious laughter of the

crowd who knew him as "a Welcher," and thought him only too well served.

Policemen rushed in at all points, rural and metropolitan, breathless, austere, and, of course, too late. Bertie turned to them, with a slight wave of his hand, to sign them away.

"Don't trouble yourselves! It's nothing *you* could interfere in; take care that person does not come into the betting ring again, that's all."

The Seraph, Lord Constantia, Wentworth, and many others of his set, catching sight of the turmoil and of "Beauty," with the great square-set figure of Ben Davis pressed before him through the mob, forced their way up as quickly as they could; but before they reached the spot Cecil was sauntering back to meet them, cool and listless, and a little bored with so much exertion, his cheroot in his mouth, and his ear serenely deaf to the clamor about the ditch.

He looked apologetically at the Seraph and the others; he felt some apology was required for having so far wandered from all the canons of his Order as to have approached "a row," and run the risk of a scene.

"Turf *must* be cleared of these scamps, you see," he said, with a half sigh. "Law can't do anything. Fellow was trying to 'get on' with the young one, too. *Don't* bet with those riff-raff, Berk. The great bookmakers will make you dead money, and the little Legs will do worse to you."

The boy hung his head, but looked sulky rather than thankful for his brother's interference with himself and the Welcher.

"You have done the Turf a service, Beauty—a very great service; there's no doubt about that," said the Seraph. "Law can't do anything, as you say; opinion

must clear the ring of such rascals; a Welcher ought not to dare to show his face here; but, at the same time, *you* oughtn't to have gone unsteadying your muscle, and risking the firmness of your hand at such a minute as this, with pitching that fellow over. Why couldn't you wait till afterward? or have let me do it?"

"My dear Seraph," murmured Bertie, languidly, "I've gone in to-day for exertion; a little more or less is nothing. Besides, Welchers are slippery dogs, you know."

He did not add that it was having seen Ben Davis taking odds with his young brother which had spurred him to such instantaneous action with that disreputable personage, who, beyond doubt, only received a tithe part of his deserts, and merited to be double-thonged off every course in the kingdom.

Rake at that instant darted panting like a hot retriever out of the throng. "Mr. Cecil, sir, will you please come to the weights—the saddling bell's a going to ring, and——"

"Tell them to wait for me; I shall only be twenty minutes dressing," said Cecil, quietly, regardless that the time at which the horses should have been at the starting-post was then clanging from the clock within the Grand Stand. Did you ever go to a gentleman-rider race where the jocks were not at least an hour behind time, and considered themselves, on the whole, very tolerably punctual? At last, however, he sauntered into the dressing-shed, and was aided by Rake into tops that had at length achieved a spotless triumph, and the scarlet gold-broidered jacket of his fair friend's art with white hoops, and the "Cœur Vaillant se fait Royaume" on the collar, and the white gleaming sash to be worn across it, fringed by the same fair hands with silver.

Meanwhile, the "Welcher," driven off the course by

a hooting and indignant crowd, shaking the water from his clothes, with bitter oaths, and livid with a deadly passion at his exile from the harvest-field of his lawless gleanings, went his way, with a savage vow of vengeance against the "d—d dandy," the "Guards' swell," who had shown him up before the world as the scoundrel he was.

The bell was clanging and clashing passionately, as Cecil at last went down to the weights, all his friends of the Household about him, and all standing "crushers" on their champion, for their stringent *esprit du corps* was involved, and the Guards are never backward in putting their gold down, as all the world knows. In the inclosure, the cynosure of devouring eyes, stood the King, with the *sang froid* of a superb gentleman, amid the clamor raging round him, one delicate ear laid back now and then, but otherwise indifferent to the din, with his coat glistening like satin, the beautiful tracery of vein and muscle, like the veins of vine-leaves, standing out on the glossy, clear-carved neck that had the arch of Circassia, and his dark, antelope eyes gazing with a gentle, pensive earnestness on the shouting crowd.

His rivals, too, were beyond par in fitness and in condition, and there were magnificent animals among them. Bay Regent was a huge raking chestnut, upwards of sixteen hands, and enormously powerful, with very fine shoulders, and an all-over-like-going head; he belonged to a Colonel in the Rifles, but was to be ridden by Jimmy Delmar of the 10th Lancers, whose colors were violet with orange hoops. Montacute's horse, Pas de Charge, which carried all the money of the Heavy Cavalry, Montacute himself being in the Dragoon Guards, was of much the same order, a black hunter with racing blood in him, loins and withers that assured any amount of force, and no fault but that of a rather coarse head,

traceable to a slur on his 'scutcheon on the distaff side from a plebeian great-grandmother, who had been a cart mare, the only stain in his otherwise faultless pedigree. However, she had given him her massive shoulders, so that he was in some sense a gainer by her after all. Wild Geranium was a beautiful creature enough, a bright bay Irish mare, with that rich red gloss that is like the glow of a horse chestnut, very perfect in shape, though a trifle light perhaps, and with not quite strength enough in neck or barrel; she would jump the fences of her own paddock half a dozen times a day for sheer amusement, and was game to anything.* She was entered by Cartouche of the Enniskillens, to be ridden by "Baby Grafton," of the same corps, a feather weight, and quite a boy, but with plenty of science in him. These were the three favorites; Day Star ran them close, the property of Durham Vavassour, of the Scots Greys, and to be ridden by his owner, a handsome, flea-bitten, gray sixteen-hander, with ragged hips, and action that looked a trifle string-halty, but noble shoulders, and great force in the loins and withers; the rest of the field, though unusually excellent, did not find so many "sweet voices" for them, and were not so much to be feared: each starter was of course much backed by his party, but the betting was tolerably even on these four:—all famous steeple-chasers; —the King at one time, and Bay Regent at another, slightly leading in the Ring.

Thirty-two starters were hoisted up on the telegraph-board, and as the field got at last under weigh, uncommonly handsome they looked, while the silk jackets of all the colors of the rainbow glittered in the bright noon-

* The portrait of this lady is that of a very esteemed young Irish beauty of my acquaintance; she this season did seventy-six miles on a warm June day, and ate her corn and tares afterwards as if nothing happened. She is six years old.

sun. As Forest King closed in, perfectly tranquil still, but beginning to glow and quiver all over with excitement, knowing as well as his rider the work that was before him, and longing for it in every muscle and every limb, while his eyes flashed fire as he pulled at the curb and tossed his head aloft, there went up a general shout of "Favorite!" His beauty told on the populace, and even somewhat on the professionals, though the legs kept a strong business prejudice against the working powers of "the Guards' crack." The ladies began to lay dozens in gloves on him; not altogether for his points, which, perhaps, they hardly appreciated, but for his owner and rider, who, in the scarlet and gold, with the white sash across his chest, and a look of serene indifference on his face, they considered the handsomest man of the field. The Household is usually safe to win the suffrages of the sex.

In the throng on the course Rake instantly bonneted an audacious dealer who had ventured to consider that Forest King was "light and curby in the 'ock." "You're a wise 'un, you are!" retorted the wrathful and ever-eloquent Rake, "there's more strength in his clean flat legs, bless him! than in all the round, thick, mill-posts of *your* half-breds, that have no more tendon than a bit of wood, and are just as flabby as a sponge!" Which hit the dealer home just as his hat was hit over his eyes; Rake's arguments being unquestionable in their force.

The thoroughbreds pulled and fretted, and swerved in their impatience; one or two over-contumacious bolted incontinently, others put their heads between their knees in the endeavor to draw their riders over their withers; Wild Geranium reared straight upright, fidgeted all over with longing to be off, passaged with the prettiest, wickedest grace in the world, and would have given the world to neigh if she had dared, but she knew it would

be very bad style, so like an aristocrat as she was, restrained herself; Bay Regent almost sawed Jimmy Delmar's arms off looking like a Titan Bucephalus; while Forest King, with his nostrils dilated till the scarlet tinge on them glowed in the sun, his muscles quivering with excitement as intense as the little Irish mare's, and all his Eastern and English blood on fire for the fray, stood steady as a statue for all that, under the curb of a hand light as a woman's, but firm as iron to control, and used to guide him by the slightest touch.

All eyes were on that throng of the first mounts in the Service; brilliant glances by the hundred gleamed down behind hot-house bouquets of their chosen color, eager ones by the thousand stared thirstily from the crowded course, the roar of the Ring subsided for a second, a breathless attention and suspense succeeded it; the Guardsmen sat on their drags, or lounged near the ladies with their race-glasses ready, and their habitual expression of gentle and resigned weariness in nowise altered, because the Household, all in all, had from sixty to seventy thousand on the event, and the Seraph murmured mournfully to his cheroot, "that chestnut's no end *fit*," strong as his faith was in the champion of the Brigades.

A moment's good start was caught—the flag dropped—off they went sweeping out for the first second like a line of Cavalry about to charge.

Another moment, and they were scattered over the first field, Forest King, Wild Geranium, and Bay Regent leading for two lengths, when Montacute, with his habitual "fast burst," sent Pas de Charge past them like lightning. The Irish mare gave a rush and got alongside of him; the King would have done the same, but Cecil checked him and kept him in that cool swinging canter which covered the grassland so lightly; Bay Regent's

vast thundering stride was Olympian, but Jimmy Delmar saw his worst foe in the "Guards' crack," and waited on him warily, riding superbly himself.

The first fence disposed of half the field, they crossed the second in the same order, Wild Geranium racing neck to neck with Pas de Charge; the King was all athirst to join the duello, but his owner kept him gently back, saving his pace and lifting him over the jumps as easily as a lapwing. The second fence proved a cropper to several, some awkward falls took place over it, and failing commenced; after the third field, which was heavy plow, all knocked off but eight, and the real struggle began in sharp earnest: a good dozen who had shown a splendid stride over the grass being done up by the terrible work on the clods.

The five favorites had it all to themselves; Day Star pounding onward at tremendous speed, Pas de Charge giving slight symptoms of distress owing to the madness of his first burst, the Irish mare literally flying ahead of him, Forest King and the chestnut waiting on one another.

In the Grand Stand the Seraph's eyes strained after the Scarlet and White, and he muttered in his moustaches, "Ye Gods what's up! The world's coming to an end! —Beauty's turned cautious!"

Cautious, indeed,—with that giant of Pytchley fame running neck to neck by him; cautious,—with two-thirds of the course unrun, and all the yawners yet to come; cautious,—with the blood of Forest King lashing to boiling heat, and the wondrous greyhound stride stretching out faster and faster beneath him, ready at a touch to break away and take the lead: but he would be reckless enough by-and-by; reckless, as his nature was, under the indolent serenity of habit.

Two more fences came, laced high and stiff with the Shire thorn, and with scarce twenty feet between them, the heavy plowed land leading to them, clotted, and black, and hard, with the fresh earthy scent steaming up as the hoofs struck the clods with a dull thunder:—Pas de Charge rose to the first: distressed too early, his hind feet caught in the thorn, and he came down rolling clear of his rider; Montacute picked him up with true science, but the day was lost to the Heavy Cavalry men. Forest King went in and out over both like a bird and led for the first time; the chestnut was not to be beat at fencing and ran even with him; Wild Geranium flew still as fleet as a deer, true to her sex she would not bear rivalry; but little Grafton, though he rode like a professional, was but a young one, and went too wildly, her spirit wanted cooler curb.

And now only, Cecil loosened the King to his full will and his full speed. Now only, the beautiful Arab head was stretched like a racer's in the run-in for the Derby, and the grand stride swept out till the hoofs seemed never to touch the dark earth they skimmed over; neither whip nor spur was needed, Bertie had only to leave the gallant temper and the generous fire that were roused in their might, to go their way, and hold their own. His hands were low; his head a little back; his face very calm, the eyes only had a daring, eager, resolute will lighting in them; Brixworth lay before him. He knew well what Forest King could do; but he did not know how great the chestnut Regent's powers might be.

The water gleamed before them, brown and swollen, and deepened with the meltings of winter snows a month before; the brook that has brought so many to grief over its famous banks, since cavaliers leapt it with their falcon on their wrist, or the mellow note of the horn rang over

the woods in the hunting days of Stuart reigns. They knew it well, that long dark line, skimmering there in the sunlight, the test that all must pass who go in for the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon. Forest King scented water, and went on with his ears pointed, and his greyhound stride lengthening, quickening, gathering up all its force and its impetus for the leap that was before—then like the rise and the swoop of a heron he spanned the water, and, landing clear, launched forward with the lunge of a spear darted through air. Brixworth was passed—the Scarlet and White, a mere gleam of bright color, a mere speck in the landscape, to the breathless crowds in the stand, sped on over the brown and level grassland; two and a quarter miles done in four minutes and twenty seconds. Bay Regent was scarcely behind him; the chestnut abhorred the water, but a finer trained hunter was never sent over the Shires, and Jimmy Delmar rode like Grimshaw himself. The giant took the leap in magnificent style, and thundered on neck and neck with the "Guards' crack." The Irish mare followed, and with miraculous gameness, landed safely; but her hind legs slipped on the bank, a moment was lost, and "Baby" Grafton scarce knew enough to recover it, though he scoured on nothing daunted.

Pas de Charge, much behind, refused the yawner, his strength was not more than his courage, but both had been strained too severely at first. Montacute struck the spurs into him with a savage blow over the head; the madness was its own punishment; the poor brute rose blindly to the jump, and missed the bank with a reel and a crash; Sir Eyre was hurled out into the brook, and the hope of the Heavies lay there with his breast and forelegs resting on the ground, his hind quarters in the water, and his back broken. Pas de Charge would never

again see the starting-flag waved, or hear the music of the hounds, or feel the gallant life throb and glow through him at the rallying notes of the horn. His race was run.

Not knowing, or looking, or heeding what happened behind, the trio tore on over the meadow and the plowed; the two favorites neck by neck, the game little mare hopelessly behind through that one fatal moment over Brixworth. The turnings-flags were passed; from the crowds on the course a great hoarse roar came louder and louder, and the shouts rang, changing every second, "Forest King wins," "Bay Regent wins," "Scarlet and White's ahead," "Violet's up with him," "Violet's past him," "Scarlet recovers," "Scarlet beats," "A cracker on the King," "Ten to one on the Regent," "Guards are over the fence first," "Guards are winning," "Guards are losing," "Guards are beat!!"

Were they!

As the shout rose, Cecil's left stirrup leather snapped and gave way; at the pace they were going most men, ay, and good riders too, would have been hurled out of their saddle by the shock; he scarcely swerved; a moment to ease the King and to recover his equilibrium, then he took the pace up again as though nothing had chanced. And his comrades of the Household when they saw this through their race-glasses, broke through their serenity and burst into a cheer that echoed over the grasslands and the coppices like a clarion, the grand rich voice of the Seraph leading foremost and loudest—a cheer that rolled mellow and triumphant down the cold bright air like the blast of trumpets, and thrilled on Bertie's ear where he came down the course a mile away. It made his heart beat quicker with a victorious headlong delight, as his knees pressed closer into Forest King's

flanks, and, half stirrupless like the Arabs, he thundered forward to the greatest riding feat of his life. His face was very calm still, but his blood was in tumult, the delirium of pace has got on him, a minute of life like this was worth a year, and he knew that he would win or die for it, as the land seemed to fly like a black sheet under him, and, in that killing speed, fence and hedge and double and water all went by him like a dream, whirling underneath him as the Gray stretches, stomach to earth, over the level, and rose to leap after leap.

For that instant's pause, when the stirrup broke, threatened to lose him the race.

He was more than a length behind the Regent, whose hoofs as they dashed the ground up sounded iike thunder, and for whose herculean strength the plow has no terrors; it was more than the lead to keep now, there was ground to cover, and the King was losing like Wild Geranium. Cecil felt drunk with that strong, keen, west wind that blew so strongly in his teeth, a passionate excitation was in him, every breath of winter air that rushed in its bracing currents round him seemed to lash him like a stripe:—the Household to look on and see him beaten!

Certain wild blood that lay latent in Cecil under the tranquil gentleness of temper and of custom, woke, and had the mastery; he set his teeth hard, and his hands clinched like steel on the bridle, "Oh! my beauty, my beauty," he cried, all unconsciously half aloud as they clear the thirty-sixth fence. "Kill me if you like, but don't *fail* me!"

As though Forest King heard the prayer and answered it with all his hero's heart, the splendid form launched faster out, the stretching stride stretched farther yet with lightning spontaneity, every fibre strained, every

nerve struggled, with a magnificent bound like an antelope the Gray recovered the ground he had lost, and passed Bay Regent by a quarter-length. It was a neck to neck race once more, across the three meadows with the last and lower fences that were between them and the final leap of all; that ditch of artificial water with the towering double hedge of oak rails and of blackthorn that was reared black and grim and well-nigh hopeless just in front of the Grand Stand. A roar like the roar of the sea broke up from the thronged course as the crowd hung breathless on the even race; ten thousand shouts rang as thrice ten thousand eyes watched the closing contest, as superb a sight as the Shires ever saw while the two ran together, the gigantic Chestnut, with every massive sinew swelled and strained to tension, side by side with the marvellous grace, the shining flanks, and the Arabian-like head of the Guards' horse.

Louder and wilder the shrieked tumult rose: "The Chestnut beats!" "The Gray beats!" "Scarlet's ahead!" "Bay Regent's caught him!" "Violet's winning, Violet's winning!" "The King's neck by neck!" "The King's beating!" "The Guards will get it!" "The Guards' crack has it!" "Not yet, not yet!" "Violet will thrash him at the jump!" "Now for it!" "The Guards, the Guards, the Guards!" "Scarlet will win!" "The King has the finish!" "No, no, no, NO!"

Sent along at a pace that Epsom flat never eclipsed, sweeping by the Grand Stand like the flash of electric flame, they ran side to side one moment more, their foam flung on each other's withers, their breath hot in each other's nostrils, while the dark earth flew beneath their stride. The blackthorn was in front behind five bars of solid oak, the water yawning on its farther side, black and deep, and fenced, twelve feet wide if it were an inch,

with the same thorn wall beyond it; a leap no horse should have been given, no Steward should have set. Cecil pressed his knees closer and closer, and worked the gallant hero for the test; the surging roar of the throng, though so close, was dull on his ear; he heard nothing, knew nothing, saw nothing but that lean chestnut head beside him, the dull thud on the turf of the flying gallop, and the black wall that reared in his face. Forest King had done so much, could he have stay and strength for this?

Cecil's hands clinched unconsciously on the bridle, and his face was very pale—pale with excitation—as his foot where the stirrup was broken crushed closer and harder against the Gray's flanks.

"Oh, my darling, my beauty—*now!*"

One touch of the spur—the first—and Forest King rose at the leap, all the life and power there were in him gathered for one superhuman and crowning effort; a flash of time, not half a second in duration, and he was lifted in the air higher, and higher, and higher in the cold, fresh, wild winter wind; stakes and rails, and thorn and water lay beneath him black and gaunt and shapeless, yawning like a grave; one bound, even in mid air, one last convulsive impulse of the gathered limbs, and Forest King was over!

And as he galloped up the straight run-in, he was alone.

Bay Regent had refused the leap.

As the Gray swept to the Judge's chair, the air was rent with deafening cheers that seemed to reel like drunken shouts from the multitude. "The Guards win, the Guards win;" and when his rider pulled up at the distance with the full sun shining on the scarlet and white, with the gold glisten of the embroidered "Cœur

Vaillant se fait Royaume," Forest King stood in all his glory, winner of the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon, by a feat without its parallel in all the annals of the Gold Vase.

But as the crowd surged about him, and the mad cheering crowned his victory, and the Household in the splendor of their triumph and the fullness of their gratitude rushed from the drags and the stands to cluster to his saddle, Bertie looked as serenely and listlessly nonchalant as of old, while he nodded to the Seraph with a gentle smile.

"Rather a close finish, eh? Have you any Moselle Cup going there? I'm a little thirsty."

Outsiders would much sooner have thought him defeated than triumphant; no one, who had not known him, could possibly have imagined that he had been successful; an ordinary spectator would have concluded that, judging by the resigned weariness of his features, he had won the race greatly against his own will, and to his own infinite ennui. No one could have dreamt that he was thinking in his heart of hearts how passionately he loved the gallant beast that had been victor with him, and that, if he had followed out the momentary impulse in him, he could have put his arm round the noble bowed neck and kissed the horse like a woman!

The Moselle Cup was brought to refresh the tired champion, and before he drank it Bertie glanced at a certain place in the Grand Stand and bent his head as the cup touched his lips: it was a dedication of his victory to the Queen of Beauty. Then he threw himself lightly out of saddle, and, as Forest King was led away for the after ceremony of bottling, rubbing, and clothing, his rider, regardless of the roar and hubbub of the course, and of the tumultuous cheers, that welcomed both

him and his horse from the men who pressed round him, into whose pockets he had put thousands on thousands, and whose ringing hurrahs greeted the "Guards' crack," passed straight up toward Jimmy Delmar, and held out his hand.

"You gave me a close thing, Major Delmar. The Vase is as much yours as mine; if your Chestnut had been as good a water jumper as he is a fencer, we should have been neck to neck at the finish."

The browned Indian-sunned face of the Lancer broke up into a cordial smile, and he shook the hand held out to him warmly; defeat and disappointment had cut him to the core, for Jimmy was the first riding man of the Light Cavalry; but he would not have been the frank campaigner that he was if he had not responded to the graceful and generous overture of his rival and conqueror.

"Oh, I can take a beating," he said, good humouredly; "at any rate, I am beat by the Guards, and it is very little humiliation to lose against such riding as yours and such a magnificent brute as your King. I congratulate you most heartily, most sincerely."

And he meant it, too. Jimmy never canted, nor did he ever throw the blame, with paltry savage vindictiveness, on the horse he had ridden. Some men there are —their name is legion—who never allow that it is *their* fault when they are "nowhere;"—oh, no! it is the "cursed screw" always, according to them. But a very good rider will not tell you that.

Cecil, while he talked, was glancing up at the Grand Stand, and when the others dispersed to look over the horses, and he had put himself out of his shell into his sealskin in the dressing-shed, he went up thither without a moment's loss of time.

He knew them all; those dainty beauties with their delicate cheeks just brightened by the western winterly wind, and their rich furs and laces glowing among the colors of their respective heroes; he was the pet of them all; "Beauty" had the suffrages of the sex without exception; he was received with bright smiles and graceful congratulations, even from those who had espoused Eyre Montacute's cause, and still fluttered their losing azure, though the poor hunter lay dead, with his back broken, and a pistol-ball mercifully sent through his brains—the martyr to a man's hot haste, as the dumb things have ever been since creation began.

Cecil passed them as rapidly as he could for one so well received by them, and made his way to the centre of the Stand, to the same spot at which he had glanced when he had drank the Moselle.

A lady turned to him; she looked like a rose camellia in her floating scarlet and white, just toned down and made perfect by a shower of Spanish lace; a beautiful brunette, dashing, yet delicate; a little fast, yet intensely thoroughbred; a coquette who would smoke a cigarette, yet a peeress who would never lose her dignity.

"*Au cœur vaillant rien d'impossible!*" she said, with an *envoi* of her lorgnon, and a smile that should have intoxicated him—a smile that might have rewarded a Richepanse for a Hohenlinden. "Superbly ridden! I absolutely trembled for you as you lifted the King to that last leap. It was terrible!"

It was terrible; and a woman, to say nothing of a woman who was in love with him, might well have felt a heartsick fear at sight of that yawning water, and those towering walls of blackthorn, where one touch of the hoofs on the topmost bough, one spring too short of the gathered limbs, must have been death to both horse and

rider. But, as she said it, she was smiling, radiant, full of easy calm and racing interest, as became her ladyship who had had "bets at even" before now on Goodwood fillies, and could lead the first flight over the Belvoir and the Quorn countries. It was possible that her ladyship was too thoroughbred not to see a man killed over the oak-rails without deviating into unseemly emotion, or being capable of such bad style as to be agitated.

Bertie, however, in answer, threw the tenderest eloquence into his eyes; very learned in such eloquence.

"If I could not have been victorious while *you* looked on, I would at least not have lived to meet you here!"

She laughed a little, so did he; they were used to exchange these passages in an admirably artistic masquerade, but it was always a little droll to each of them to see the other wear the domino of sentiment, and neither had much credence in the other.

"What a preux chevalier!" cried his Queen of Beauty. "You would have died in a ditch out of homage to me. Who shall say that chivalry is past? Tell me, Bertie, is it so very delightful that desperate effort to break your neck? It looks pleasant, to judge by its effects. It is the only thing in the world that amuses you!"

"Well—there is a great deal to be said for it," replied Bertie, musingly. "You see, until one *has* broken one's neck, the excitement of the thing isn't totally worn out; can't be, naturally, because the—what-do-you-call-it?—consummation isn't attained till then. The worst of it is, it's getting commonplace, getting vulgar, such a number break *their* necks, doing Alps and that sort of thing, that we shall have nothing at all left to ourselves soon."

"Not even the monopoly of sporting suicide! Very hard," said her ladyship, with the lowest, most languid

laugh in the world, very like "Beauty's" own, save that it had a considerable inflection of studied affectation, of which he, however much of a dandy he was, was wholly guiltless. "Well! you won magnificently; that little black man, who is he? Lancers, somebody said?—ran you so fearfully close. I really thought at one time that the Guards had lost."

"Do you suppose that a man happy enough to wear Lady Guenevere's colors could lose? An embroidered scarf given by such hands has been a gage of victory ever since the days of tournaments!" murmured Cecil with the softest tenderness, but just enough laziness in the tone and laughter in the eye to make it highly doubtful whether he was not laughing both at her and at himself, and was wondering why the deuce a fellow had to talk such nonsense. Yet she was Lady Guenevere, with whom he had been in love ever since they stayed together at Belvoir for the Croxton Park week the autumn previous; and who was beautiful enough to make their "friendship" as enchanting as a page out of the "Decamerome." And while he bent over her, flirting in the fashion that made him the darling of the drawing-rooms, and looking down into her superb Velasquez eyes, he did not know, and if he had known would have been careless of it, that afar off, white with rage, and with his gaze straining on to the course through his race-glass, Ben Davis, "the Welcher," who had watched the finish—watched the "Guards' crack" landed at the distance—muttered, with a mastiff's savage growl:

"He wins, does he? Curse him! The d—d swell—he sha'n't win long."

CHAPTER IV.

Love à la Mode.

LIFE was very pleasant at Royallieu.

It lay in the Melton country, and was equally well placed for Pytchley, Quorn, and Belvoir, besides possessing its own small but very perfect pack of "little ladies," or the "demoiselles," as they were severally nicknamed; the game was closely preserved, pheasants were fed on Indian corn till they were the finest birds in the country, and in the little winding paths of the elder and bilberry coverts thirty first-rate shots, with two loading-men to each, could find flock and feather to amuse them till dinner, with rocketers and warm corners enough to content the most insatiate of knickerbockered gunners. The stud was superb; the cook, a French artist of consummate genius, who had a brougham to his own use, and wore diamonds of the first water; in the broad beech-studded grassy lands no lesser thing than doe and deer ever swept through the thick ferns in the sunlight and the shadow; a retinue of powdered servants filled the old halls, and guests of highest degree dined in its stately banqueting-room, with its scarlet and gold, its Vandykes and its Vernets, and yet—there was terribly little money at Royallieu with it all. Its present luxury was purchased at the cost of the future, and the parasite of extravagance was constantly sapping, unseen, the gallant old Norman-planted oak of the family-tree. But then, who thought of that? Nobody. It was the way of the House never to take count of the morrow.

True, any one of them would have died a hundred deaths rather than have had one acre of the beautiful green diadem of woods felled by the axe of the timber

contractor, or passed to the hands of a stranger; but no one among them ever thought that this was the inevitable end to which they surely drifted with blind and unthinking improvidence. The old Viscount, haughtiest of haughty nobles, would never abate one jot of his accustomed magnificence; and his sons had but imbibed the teaching of all that surrounded them; they did but do in manhood what they had been unconsciously moulded to do in boyhood, when they were sent to Eton at ten with gold dressing-boxes to grace their Dame's tables, embryo Dukes for their co-fags, and tastes that already knew to a nicety the worth of the champagnes at the Christopher. The old, old story—how it repeats itself! Boys grow up amid profuse prodigality, and are launched into a world where they can no more arrest themselves, than the feather-weight can pull in the lightning stride of the two-year old, who defies all check, and takes the flat as he chooses. They are brought up like young Dauphins, and tossed into the costly whirl to float as best they can—on nothing. Then, on the lives and deaths that follow; on the graves where a dishonoured alien lies forgotten by the dark Austrian lake-side, or under the monastic shadow of some crumbling Spanish crypt; where a red cross chills the lonely traveller in the virgin solitudes of Amazonian forest aisles, or the wild scarlet creepers of Australia trail over a nameless mound above the trackless stretch of sun-warmed waters—then at them the world "shoots out its lips with scorn." Not on *them* lies the blame.

A wintry, watery sun was shining on the terraces as Lord Royallieu paced up and down the morning after the Grand Military; his step and limbs excessively enfeebled, but the carriage of his head and the flash of his dark hawk's eyes as proud and untameable as in his earliest years. He never left his own apartments; and no one,

save his favorite "little Berk," ever went to him without his desire. He was too sensitive a man to thrust his age and ailing health in among the young leaders of fashion, the wild men of pleasure, the good wits and the good shots of his son's set; he knew very well that his own day was past; that they would have listened to him out of the patience of courtesy, but that they would have wished him away as "no end of a bore." He was too shrewd not to know this; but he was too quickly galled ever to bear to have it recalled to him.

He looked up suddenly and sharply: coming toward him he saw the figure of the Guardsman. For "Beauty" the Viscount had no love; indeed, well-nigh a hatred, for a reason never guessed by others, and never betrayed by him.

Bertie was not like the Royallieu race; he resembled his mother's family. She, a beautiful and fragile creature whom her second son had loved, for the first years of his life, as he would have thought it now impossible that he could love any one, had married the Viscount with no affection toward him, while he had adored her with a fierce and jealous passion that her indifference only inflamed. Throughout her married life, however, she had striven to render loyalty and tenderness toward a lord into whose arms she had been thrown, trembling and reluctant; of his wife's fidelity he could not entertain a doubt, though that he had never won her heart he could not choose but know. He knew more, too; for she had told it him with a noble candor before he wedded her; knew that the man she did love was a penniless cousin, a cavalry officer, who had made a famous name among the wild mountain tribes of Northern India. This cousin, Alan Bertie—a fearless and chivalrous soldier, fitter for the days of knighthood than for these—had seen Lady

Royallieu at Nice, some three years after her marriage; accident had thrown them across each other's path; the old love, stronger, perhaps, now than it had ever been, had made him linger in her presence—had made her shrink from sending him to exile. Evil tongues at last had united their names together; Alan Bertie had left the woman he idolized lest slander should touch her through him, and fallen two years later under the dark dank forests on the desolate moorside of the hills of Hindostan, where long before he had rendered "Bertie's Horse" the most famous of all the wild Irregulars of the East.

After her death, Lord Royallieu found Alan's miniature among her papers, and recalled those winter months by the Mediterranean till he cherished, with the fierce, eager, self-torture of a jealous nature, doubts and suspicions that, during her life, one glance from her eyes would have disarmed and abashed. Her second and favorite child bore her family name—her late lover's name; and, in resembling her race, resembled the dead soldier. It was sufficient to make him hate Bertie with a cruel and savage detestation, which he strove indeed to temper, for he was by nature a just man, and, in his better moments, knew that his doubts wronged both the living and the dead; but which colored, too strongly to be dissembled, all his feelings and his actions toward his son, and might both have soured and wounded any temperament less nonchalantly gentle and supremely careless than Cecil's.

As it was, Bertie was sometimes surprised at his father's dislike to him, but never thought much about it, and attributed it, when he did think of it, to the caprices of a tyrannous old man. To be jealous of the favor shown to his boyish brother could never for a moment have come into his imagination. Lady Royallieu with her last words had left the little fellow, a child of three years old, to the

affection and the care of Bertie—himself then a boy of twelve or fourteen—and little as he thought of such things now, the trust of his dying mother had never been wholly forgotten.

A heavy gloom came now over the Viscount's still handsome aquiline, saturnine face, as his second son approached up the terrace; Bertie was too like the cavalry soldier whose form he had last seen standing against the rose light of a Mediterranean sunset. The soldier had been dead eight-and-twenty years; but the jealous hate was not dead yet.

Cecil took off his hunting-cap with a courtesy that sat very well on his habitual languid nonchalance; he never called his father anything but "Royal;" rarely saw, still less rarely consulted him, and cared not a straw for his censure or opinion; but he was too thoroughbred by nature to be able to follow the underbred indecorum of the day which makes disrespect to old age the fashion. "You sent for me?" he asked, taking the cigarette out of his mouth.

"No, sir," answered the old lord, curtly, "I sent for your brother. The fools can't take even a message right now, it seems."

"Shouldn't have named us so near alike; it's often a bore!" said Bertie.

"I didn't name you, sir; your mother named you," answered his father, sharply; the subject irritated him.

"It's of no consequence which!" murmured Cecil, with an expostulatory wave of his cigar. "We're not even asked whether we like to come into the world; we can't expect to be asked what we like to be called in it. Good day to you, sir."

He turned to move away to the house; but his father stopped him; he knew that he had been discourteous —

a far worse crime in Lord Royallieu's eyes than to be heartless.

"So you won the Vase yesterday?" he asked, pausing in his walk with his back bowed, but his stern, silver-haired head erect.

"*I* didn't; the King did."

"That's absurd, sir," said the Viscount, in his resonant and yet melodious voice. "The finest horse in the world may have his back broke by bad riding, and a screw has won before now when it's been finely handled. The finish was tight, wasn't it?"

"Well—rather. I have ridden closer spins, though. The fallows were light."

Lord Royallieu smiled grimly.

"I know what the Shire 'plow' is like," he said, with a flash of his falcon eyes over the landscape, where, in the days of his youth, he had led the first flight so often, George Rex, and Waterford, and the Berkeleys, and the rest following the rally of his hunting-horn. "You won much in bets?"

"Very fair. Thanks."

"And won't be a shilling richer for it this day next week!" retorted the Viscount, with a rasping, grating irony; he could not help darting savage thrusts at this man who looked at him with eyes so cruelly like Alan Bertie's. "You play 5*l.* points, and lay 500*l.* on the odd trick, I've heard, at your whist in the Clubs—pretty prices for a younger son!"

"Never bet on the odd trick; spoils the game; makes you sacrifice play *to* the trick. We always bet on the game," said Cecil, with gentle weariness; the sweetness of his temper was proof against his father's attacks upon his patience.

"No matter *what* you bet, sir; you live as if you were a Rothschild, while you are a beggar?"

"Wish I were a beggar: fellows always have no end in stock, they say; and your tailor can't worry you very much when all you have to think about is an artistic arrangement of tatters!" murmured Bertie, whose impenetrable serenity was never to be ruffled by his father's bitterness.

"You will soon have your wish, then," retorted the Viscount, with the unprovoked and reasonless passion which he vented on every one, but on none so much as the son he hated. "You are on a royal road to it. I live out of the world, but I hear from it, sir. I hear that there is not a man in the Guards—not even Lord Rockingham—who lives at the rate of imprudence you do; that there is not a man who drives such costly horses, keeps such costly mistresses, games to such desperation, fools gold away with such idiocy as you do. You conduct yourself as if you were a millionaire, sir, and what are you? A pauper on my bounty, and on your brother Montagu's after me—a pauper with a tinsel fashion, a gilded beggary, a Queen's commission to cover a sold-out poverty, a dandy's reputation to stave off a defaulter's future! A pauper, sir—and a Guardsman!"

The coarse and cruel irony flashed out with wicked scorching malignity, lashing and upbraiding the man who was the victim of his own unwisdom and extravagance.

A slight tinge of color came on his son's face as he heard; but he gave no sign that he was moved, no sign of impatience or anger. He lifted his cap again, not in irony, but with a grave respect in his action that was totally contrary to his whole temperament.

"This sort of talk is very exhausting, very bad style,"

he said, with his accustomed gentle murmur. "I will bid you good morning, my lord."

And he went without another word. Crossing the length of the old-fashioned Elizabethan terrace, little Berk passed him; he motioned the lad toward the Viscount. "Royal wants to see you, young one."

The boy nodded and went onward; and as Bertie turned to enter the low door that led out to the stables he saw his father meet the lad—meet him with a smile that changed the whole character of his face, and pleasant kindly words of affectionate welcome, drawing his arm about Berkeley's shoulder, and looking with pride upon his bright and gracious youth.

More than an old man's preference would be thus won by the young one; a considerable portion of their mother's fortune, so left that it could not be dissipated, yet could be willed to which son the Viscount chose, would go to his brother by this passionate partiality; but there was not a tinge of jealousy in Cecil; whatever else his faults he had no mean ones, and the boy was dear to him, by a quite unconscious yet unvarying obedience to his dead mother's wish.

"Royal hates me as game-birds hate a red dog. Why the deuce, I wonder?" he thought, with a certain slight touch of pain despite his idle philosophies and devil-may-care indifference. "Well—I *am* good for nothing, I suppose. Certainly I am not good for much, unless it's riding and making love."

With which summary of his merits, "Beauty," who felt himself to be a master in those two arts, but thought himself a bad fellow out of them, sauntered away to join the Seraph and the rest of his guests. His father's words pursuing him a little despite his carelessness, for they had borne an unwelcome measure of truth.

"Royal can hit hard," his thoughts continued. "A pauper and a Guardsman! By Jove! it's true enough; but he made me so. They brought me up as if I had a million coming to me, and turned me out among the cracks to take my running with the best of them;—and they give me just about what pays my groom's book! Then they wonder that a fellow goes to the Jews. Where the deuce else can he go?"

And Bertie, whom his gains the day before had not much benefited, since his play-debts, his young brother's needs, and the Zu-Zu's insatiate little hands were all stretched ready to devour them without leaving a sovereign for more serious liabilities, went, for it was quite early morning, to act the M. F. H. in his father's stead at the meet on the great lawns before the house, for the Royallieu "lady-pack" were very famous in the Shires, and hunted over the same country alternate days with the Quorn. They moved off ere long to draw the Holt Wood, in as open a morning, and as strong a scenting wind as ever favored Melton Pink.

A whimper and "gone away!" soon echoed from Beebyside, and the pack, not letting the fox hang a second, dashed after him, making straight for Scraptoft. One of the fastest things up-wind that hounds ever ran took them straight through the Spinnies, past Hamilton Farm, away beyond Burkby village, and down into the valley of the Wreake without a check, where he broke away, was headed, tried earths, and was pulled down scarce forty minutes from the find. The pack then drew Hungerton foxholes blank, drew Carver's spinnies without a whimper; and lastly, drawing the old familiar Billesden Coplow, had a short quick burst with a brace of cubs, and returning, settled themselves to a fine dog fox that was raced an hour-and-half, hunted slowly for fifty

minutes, raced again another hour-and-quarter, sending all the field to their "second horses;" and after a clipping chase through the cream of the grass country, nearly saved his brush in the twilight when scent was lost in a rushing hailstorm, but had the "little ladies" laid on again like wildfire, and was killed with the "who-whoop!" ringing far and away over Glenn Gorse, after a glorious run—thirty miles in and out—with pace that tried the best of them.

A better day's sport even the Quorn had never had in all its brilliant annals, and faster things the Melton men themselves had never wanted: both those who love the "quickest thing you ever knew—thirty minutes without a check—*such* a pace!" and care little whether the *finale* be "killed" or "broke away," and those of older fashion, who prefer "long day, you know, steady as old time, the beauties stuck like wax through fourteen parishes as I live; six hours if it were a minute; horses dead beat; positively walked, you know, no end of a day!" but must have the fatal "who-whoop" as conclusion—both of these, the "new style and the old," could not but be content with the doings of the "Demoiselles" from start to finish.

Was it likely that Cecil remembered the caustic lash of his father's ironies while he was lifting Mother of Pearl over the posts and rails, and sweeping on, with the halloo ringing down the wintry wind as the grasslands flew beneath him? Was it likely that he recollected the difficulties that hung above him while he was dashing down the Gorse happy as a king, with the wild hail driving in his face, and a break of stormy sunshine just welcoming the gallant few who were landed at the death, as twilight fell? Was it likely that he could unlearn all the lessons of his life, and realize in how near a neigh-

borhood he stood to ruin when he was drinking Regency sherry out of his gold flask as he crossed the saddle of his second horse, or, smoking, rode slowly homeward, chatting with the Seraph through the leafless muddy lanes in the gloaming?

Scarcely;—it is very easy to remember our difficulties when we are eating and drinking them, so to speak, in bad soups, and worse wines in continental impecuniosity, sleeping on them as rough Australian shake-downs, or wearing them perpetually in Californian rags and tatters, it were impossible very well to escape from them then; but it is very hard to remember them when every touch and shape of life is pleasant to us—when everything about us is symbolical and redolent of wealth and ease —when the art of enjoyment is the only one we are called on to study, and the science of pleasure all we are asked to explore.

It is well-nigh impossible to believe yourself a beggar when you never want sovereigns for whist; and it would be beyond the powers of human nature to conceive your ruin irrevocable, while you still eat turbot and terrapin with a powdered giant behind your chair daily. Up in his garret a poor wretch knows very well what he is, and realizes in stern fact the extremities of the last sou, the last shirt, and the last hope; but in these devil-may-care pleasures—in this pleasant, reckless, velvet-soft rush down-hill—in this club-palace, with every luxury that the heart of man can devise and desire, yours to command at your will—it is hard work, *then*, to grasp the truth that the crossing sweeper yonder, in the dust of Pall Mall, is really not more utterly in the toils of poverty than you are!

"Beauty" was never in the whole course of his days, virtually or physically, or even metaphorically, reminded

that he was not a millionaire; much less still was he ever reminded so painfully.

Life petted him, pampered him, caressed him, gifted him, though of half his gifts he never made use; lodged him like a prince, dined him like a king, and never recalled to him by a single privation or a single sensation that he was not as rich a man as his brother-in-arms, the Seraph, future Duke of Lyonnesse. How could he then bring himself to understand, as nothing less than truth, the grim and cruel insult his father had flung at him in that brutally bitter phrase—"A Pauper and a Guardsman?" If he had ever been near a comprehension of it, which he never was, he must have ceased to realize it when—pressed to dine with Lord Guenevere near whose house the last fox had been killed, while a groom dashed over to Royallieu for his change of clothes—he caught a glimpse, as they passed through the hall, of the ladies taking their preprandial cups of tea in the library, an enchanting group of lace and silks, of delicate hue and scented hair, of blonde cheeks and brunette tresses, of dark velvets and gossamer tissue; and when he had changed the scarlet for dinner-dress, went down among them to be the darling of that charmed circle, to be smiled on and coquetted with by those soft, languid aristocrats, to be challenged by the lustrous eyes of his châtelaine and chère amie, to be spoiled, as women will spoil the privileged pet of their drawing-rooms whom they have made "free of the guild," and endowed with a flirting commission, and acquitted of anything "serious."

He was the recognized darling, and permitted property, of the young married beauties; the unwedded knew he was hopeless for *them*, and tacitly left him to the more attractive conquerors, who hardly prized the Seraph so much as they did Bertie, to sit in their barouches and

opera boxes, ride and drive and yacht with them, conduct a Boccaccio intrigue through the height of the season, and make them really believe themselves actually in love while they were at the moors or down the Nile, and would have given their diamonds to get a new distraction.

Lady Guenevere was the last of these, his titled and wedded captors; and perhaps the most resistless of all of them. Neither of them believed very much in their attachment, but both of them wore the masquerade dress to perfection. He had fallen in love with her as much as he ever fell in love, which was just sufficient to amuse him, and never enough to disturb him. He let himself be fascinated, not exerting himself either to resist or advance the affair till he was, perhaps, a little more entangled with her than it was according to his canons expedient to be; and they had the most enchanting—friendship.

Nobody was ever so indiscreet as to call it anything else; and my Lord was too deeply interested in the Alderney beauties that stood knee-deep in the yellow straw of his farmyard, and the triumphant conquests that he gained over his brother peers' Shorthorns and Suffolks, to trouble his head about Cecil's attendance on his beautiful Countess.

They corresponded in Spanish; they had a thousand charming ciphers; they made the columns of the *Times* and the *Post* play the unconscious rôle of medium to appointments; they eclipsed all the pages of Calderon's or Congreve's comedies in the ingenuities with which they met, wrote, got invitations together to the same houses, and arranged signals for mute communication: but there was not the slightest occasion for it all. It passed the time, however, and went far to persuade them that they

really were in love, and had a mountain of difficulties and dangers to contend with; it added the "spice to the sauce," and gave them the "relish of being forbidden." Besides, an open scandal would have been very shocking to her brilliant ladyship, and there was nothing on earth, perhaps, of which he would have had a more lively dread than a "scene;" but his present "friendship" was delightful, and presented no such dangers, while his fair "friend" was one of the greatest beauties and the greatest coquettes of her time. Her smile was honor; her fan was a sceptre; her face was perfect; and her heart never troubled herself or her lovers: if she had a fault, she was a trifle exacting, but that was not to be wondered at in one so omnipotent, and her chains after all were made of roses.

As she sat in the deep ruddy glow of the library fire, with the light flickering on her white brow and her violet velvets; as she floated to the head of her table, with opals shining among her priceless point laces, and some tropical flower with leaves of glistening gold crowning her bronze hair; as she glided down in a waltz along the polished floor, or bent her proud head over écarté in a musing grace that made her opponent utterly forget to mark the king or even play his cards at all; as she talked in the low music of her voice of European imbrogli, and consols and coupons, for she was a politician and a speculator, or lapsed into a beautifully tinted study of *la femme incomprise*, when time and scene suited, when the stars were very clear above the terraces without, and the conservatory very solitary, and a touch of Musset or Owen Meredith chimed in well with the light and shade of the oleanders and the brown lustre of her own eloquent glance;—in all these how superb she was!

And if in truth her bosom only fell with the falling

of Shares, and rose with the rising of Bonds; if her soft shadows were only taken up like the purple tinting under her lashes to embellish her beauty; if in her heart of hearts she thought Musset a fool, and wondered why *Lucille* was not written in prose, in her soul far preferring *Le Follet;* why,—it did not matter that I can see. All great ladies gamble in stock nowadays under the rose, and women are for the most part as cold, clear, hard, and practical as their adorers believe them the contrary; and a *femme incomprise* is so charming when she avows herself comprehended by *you*, that you would never risk spoiling the confidence by hinting a doubt of its truth. If she and Bertie only played at love; if neither believed much in the other; if each trifled with a pretty gossamer soufflet of passion much as they trifled with their soufflets at dinner; if both tried it to trifle away ennui much as they tried staking a Friedrich d'Or at Baden, this light surface fashionable philosophic form of a passion they both laughed at in its hot and serious follies, suited them admirably. Had it ever mingled a grain of bitterness in her ladyship's Souchong before dinner, or given an aroma of bitterness to her lover's Naples punch in the smoking-room, it would have been out of all keeping with themselves and their world.

Nothing on earth is so pleasant as being a little in love; nothing on earth so destructive as being too much so; and as Cecil in the idle enjoyment of the former gentle luxury flirted with his liege lady that night, lying back in the softest of lounging-chairs, with his dark, dreamy, handsome eyes looking all the eloquence in the world, and his head drooped till his moustaches were almost touching her laces, his Queen of Beauty listened with charmed interest, and to look at him he might have been praying after the poet—

How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

In real truth he was gently murmuring—

"Such a pity that you missed to-day! Hounds found directly; three of the fastest things I ever knew, one after another; you should have seen the 'little ladies' head him just above the Gorse! Three hares crossed us and a fresh fox; some of the pack broke away after the new scent, but old Bluebell, your pet, held on like death, and most of them kept after her—you had your doubts about Silver Trumpet's shoulders; they're not the thing, perhaps, but she ran beautifully all day, and didn't show a symptom of rioting."

Cecil could, when needed, do the Musset and Meredith style of thing to perfection, but on the whole he preferred love *à la mode;* it is so much easier and less exhausting to tell your mistress of a ringing run, or a close finish, than to turn perpetual periods on the lustre of her eyes, and the eternity of your devotion.

Nor did it at all interfere with the sincerity of his worship, that the Zu-Zu was at the prettiest little box in the world, in the neighborhood of Market Harborough, which he had taken for her, and had been at the meet that day in her little toy trap with its pair of snowy ponies and its bright blue liveries that drove so desperately through his finances, and had ridden his hunter Maraschino with immense dash and spirit for a young lady, who had never done anything but pirouette till the last six months, and a total and headlong disregard of "purlers," very reckless in a white-skinned, bright-eyed, illiterate, avaricious little beauty, whose face was her fortune, and who most assuredly would have been adored no single moment longer had she scarred her fair tinted cheek with the blackthorn, or started as a heroine with

a broken nose like Fielding's cherished Amelia. The Zu-Zu might rage, might sulk, might pout, might even swear all sorts of naughty Mabille oaths, most villainously pronounced, at the ascendency of her haughty unapproachable patrician rival;—she did do all these things;—but Bertie would not have been the consummate tactician, the perfect flirt, the skilled and steeled campaigner in the boudoirs that he was, if he had not been equal to the delicate task of managing both the peeress and the ballet-dancer with inimitable ability, even when they placed him in the seemingly difficult dilemma of meeting them both with twenty yards between them on the neutral ground of the gathering to see the Pytchley or the Tailby throw off—a task he had achieved with victorious brilliance more than once already this season.

"You drive a team, Beauty—never drive a team," the Seraph had said on occasion over a confidential "sherry-peg" in the mornings, meaning by the metaphor of a team Lady Guenevere, the Zu-Zu, and various other contemporaries in Bertie's affections. "Nothing on earth so dangerous; your leader will bolt, or your off-wheeler will turn sulky, or your young one will passage and make the very deuce of a row; they'll never go quiet till the end, however clever your hand is on the ribbons. Now, I'll drive six-in-hand as soon as any man,—drove a ten-hander last year in the Bois,—when the team comes out of the stables; but I'm hanged if I'd risk my neck with managing even a *pair* of women. Have one clean out of the shafts before you trot out another!"

To which salutary advice Cecil only gave a laugh, going on his own ways with the "team" as before, to the despair of his fidus Achates; the Seraph, being a quarry so incessantly pursued by dowager-beaters, chaperone-keepers, and the whole hunt of the Matrimonial Pack,

with those clever hounds Belle and Fashion ever leading in full cry after him, that he dreaded the sight of a ball-room meet; and, shunning the rich preserves of the Salons, ran to earth persistently in the shady Wood of St. John's and got—at some little cost and some risk of trapping, it is true, but still efficiently—preserved from all other hunters or poachers by the lawless Robin Hoods *aux yeux noirs* of those welcome and familiar coverts.

CHAPTER V.

Under the Keeper's Tree.

"YOU'RE a lad o' wax, my beauty!" cried Mr. Rake, enthusiastically, surveying the hero of the Grand Military with adoring eyes as that celebrity, without a hair turned or a muscle swollen from his exploit, was having a dressing down after a gentle exercise. "You've pulled it off, haven't you? You've cut the work out for 'em! You've shown 'em what a luster is! Strike me a loser, but what a deal there is in blood. The littlest pippin that ever threw a leg across the pigskin knows that *in* the stables; then why the dickens do the world run against such a plain fact *out* of it!"

And Rake gazed with worship at the symmetrical limbs of the champion of the "First Life," and plunged into speculation on the democratic tendencies of the age as clearly contradicted by all the evidences of the flat and furrow, while Forest King drank a dozen go-downs of water, and was rewarded for the patience with which he had subdued his inclination to kick, fret, spring, and break away throughout the dressing by a full feed thrown into his crib, which Rake watched him with adoring gaze eat to the very last grain.

"You precious one!" soliloquized that philosopher,

who loved the horse with a sort of passion since his victory over the Shires. "What a lot o' enemies you've been and gone and made!—that's where it is, my boy; nobody can't never forgive Success. All them fielders have lost such a sight of money by you; them book-makers have had such a lot of pots upset by you; bless you! if you were on the flat you'd be doctored or roped in no time. You've won for the gentlemen, my lovely—for your own cracks, my boy—and that's just what they'll never pardon you."

And Rake, rendered almost melancholy by his thoughts (he liked the "gentlemen" himself), went out of the box to get into saddle and ride off on an errand of his master's to the Zu-Zu at her tiny hunting-lodge, where the snow-white ponies made her stud, and where she gave enchanting little hunting-dinners, at which she sang equally enchanting little hunting-songs, and arrayed herself in the Fontainebleau hunting costume, gold-hilted knife and all, and spent Cecil's winnings for him with a rapidity that threatened to leave very few of them for the London season. She was very pretty; sweetly pretty; with hair that wanted no gold powder, the clearest, sauciest eyes, and the handsomest mouth in the world; but of grammar she had not a notion, of her aspirates she had never a recollection, of conversation she had not an idea, of slang she had, to be sure, a *répertoire*, but to this was her command of language limited. She dressed perfectly, but she was a vulgar little soul; drank everything, from Bass's ale to rum-punch, and from cherry-brandy to absinthe; thought it the height of wit to stifle you with cayenne slid into your vanille ice, and the climax of repartee to cram your hat full of peach stones and lobster shells; was thoroughly avaricious, thoroughly insatiate, thoroughly heartless, pillaged with both hands, and then

never had enough; had a coarse good nature when it cost her nothing, and was "as jolly as a grig," according to her phraseology, so long as she could stew her pigeons in champagne, drink wines and liqueurs that were beyond price, take the most dashing trap in the Park up to Flirtation Corner, and laugh and sing and eat Richmond dinners, and show herself at the Opera with Bertie or some other "swell" attached to her, in the very box next to a Duchess.

The Zu-Zu was perfectly happy; and as for the pathetic pictures that novelists and moralists draw, of vice sighing amid turtle and truffles for childish innocence in the cottage at home where honeysuckles blossomed and brown brooks made melody, and passionately grieving on the purple cushions of a barouche for the time of straw pallets and untroubled sleep, why,—the Zu-Zu would have vaulted herself on the box seat of a drag, and told you "to stow all that trash!" Her childish recollections were of a stifling lean-to with the odor of pigsty and strawyard, pork for a feast once a week, starvation all the other six days, kicks, slaps, wrangling, and a general atmosphere of beer and wash-tubs; she hated her past, and loved her cigar on the drag. The Zu-Zu is fact; the moralists' pictures are moonshine.

The Zu-Zu is an openly acknowledged fact, moreover, daily becoming more prominent in the world, more brilliant, more frankly recognized, and more omnipotent. Whether this will ultimately prove for the better or the worse, it would be a bold man who should dare say; there is at least one thing left to desire in it—*i. e.* that the synonym of "Aspasia," which serves so often to designate in journalistic literature these Free Lances of life, were more suitable in artistic and intellectual similarity, and that when the Zu-Zu and her sisterhood plunge

their white arms elbow-deep into so many fortunes, and rule the world right and left as they do, they could also sound their H's properly, and know a little orthography, if they could not be changed into such queens of grace, of intellect, of sovereign mind and splendid wit as were their prototypes when she whose name they debase held her rule in the City of the Violet Crown, and gathered about her Phidias the divine, haughty and eloquent Antipho, the gay Crates, the subtle Protagoras, Cratinus so acrid and yet so jovial, Damon of the silver lyre, and the great poets who are poets for all time. Author and artist, noble and soldier, court the Zu-Zu order now as the Athenians courted their brilliant *ἑταῖραι;* but it must be confessed that the Hellenic idols were of a more exalted type than are the Hyde Park goddesses!

However, the Zu-Zu was the rage, and spent Bertie's money when he got any just as her wilful sovereignty fancied, and Rake rode on now with his master's note, bearing no very good will to her; for Rake had very strong prejudices, and none stronger than against these fair pillagers who went about seeking whom they should devour, and laughing at the wholesale ruin that they wrought while the sentimentalists babbled in "Social Science" of "pearls lost" and "innocence betrayed."

"A girl that used to eat tripe and red herring in a six-pair back, and dance for a shilling a night in gauze, coming it so grand that she'll only eat asparagus in March, and drink the best Brands with her truffles! Why, she ain't worth sixpence thrown away on her, unless it's worth while to hear how hard she can swear at you!" averred Rake, in his eloquence; and he was undoubtedly right for that matter; but then—the Zu-Zu was the rage, and if ever she should be sold up, great ladies would crowd to her sale and buy with eager curiosity at high

prices her most trumpery pots of pomatum, her most flimsy gew-gaws of marqueterie!

Rake had seen a good deal of men and manners, and, in his own opinion at least, was "up to every dodge on the cross" that this iniquitous world could unfold. A bright, lithe, animated, vigorous, yellow-haired, and sturdy fellow, seemingly with a dash of the Celt in him that made him vivacious and peppery, Mr. Rake polished his wits quite as much as he polished the tops, and considered himself a philosopher. Whose son he was he had not the remotest idea; his earliest recollections were of the tender mercies of the workhouse; but even that chill fostermother, the parish, had not damped the liveliness of his temper or the independence of his opinions, and as soon as he was fifteen Rake had run away and joined a circus, distinguishing himself there by his genius for standing on his head and tying his limbs into a porter's knot.

From the circus he migrated successively into the shape of a comic singer, a tapster, a navvy, a bill-sticker, a guacho in Mexico (working his passage out), a fireman in New York, a ventriloquist in Maryland, a vaquero in Spanish California, a lemonade-seller in San Francisco, a revolutionist in the Argentine (without the most distant idea what he fought for), a boatman on the Bay of Mapiri, a blacksmith in Santarem, a trapper in the Wilderness, and finally, working his passage home again, took the Queen's shilling in Dublin, and was drafted into a light-cavalry regiment. With the —th he served half a dozen years in India, a rough-rider, a splendid fellow in a charge or a pursuit, with an astonishing power over horses, and the clearest back-handed sweep of a sabre that ever cut down a knot of natives; *but*—insubordinate. Do his duty whenever fighting was in question, he did

most zealously; but to kick over the traces at other times was a temptation that at last became too strong for that lawless lover of liberty.

From the moment that he joined the regiment, a certain Corporal Warne and he had conceived an antipathy to one another, which Rake had to control as he might, and which the Corporal was not above indulging in every petty piece of tyranny that his rank allowed him to exercise. On active service Rake was, by instinct, too good a soldier not to manage to keep the curb on himself tolerably well, though he was always regarded in his troop rather as a hound that *will* "riot" is regarded in the pack; but when the —th came back to Brighton and to barracks, the evil spirit of rebellion began to get a little hotter in him under the Corporal's "Idées Napoléoniennes" of justifiable persecution. Warne indisputably provoked his man in a cold, iron, strictly lawful sort of manner, moreover, all the more irritating to a temper like Rake's.

"Hanged if I care how the officers come it over me; they're gentlemen, and it don't try a fellow," would Rake say in confidential moments over purl and a penn'orth of bird's eye, his experience in the Argentine Republic having left him with strongly aristocratic prejudices; "but when it comes to a duffer like that, that knows no better than me, what *ain't* a bit better than me, and what is as clumsy a duffer about a horse's plates as ever I knew, and would a'most let a young 'un buck him out of his saddle, why then I do cut up rough, I ain't denying it, and I don't see what there is in his Stripes to give him such a license to be aggravating."

With which Rake would blow the froth off his pewter with a puff of concentrated wrath, and an oath against his non-commissioned officers that might have let some

light in upon the advocates for "promotion from the ranks" had they been there to take the lesson. At last, in the leisure of Brighton, the storm broke. Rake had a Scotch hound that was the pride of his life, his beer-money often going instead to buy dainties for the dog, who became one of the channels through which Warne could annoy and thwart him. The dog did no harm, being a fine, well-bred deerhound; but it pleased the Corporal to consider that it did, simply because it belonged to Rake, whose popularity in the corps, owing to his good nature, his good spirits, and his innumerable tales of American experiences and amorous adventures, increased the jealous dislike which his knack with an unbroken colt and his abundant stable science had first raised in his superior.

One day in the chargers' stables the hound ran out of a loose box with a rush to get at Rake, and upset a pailful of warm mash. The Corporal, who was standing by in harness, hit him over the head with a heavy whip he had in his hand; infuriated by the pain, the dog flew at him, tearing his overalls with a fierce crunch of his teeth. "Take the brute off, and string him up with a halter; I've put up with him too long!" cried Warne to a couple of privates working near in their stable dress. Before the words were out of his mouth, Rake threw himself on him with a bound like lightning, and, wrenching the whip out of his hands struck him a slashing, stinging blow across his face.

"Hang my hound, you cur! If you touch a hair of him I'll double-thong you within an inch of your life!"

And assuredly he would have kept his word had he not been made a prisoner and marched off to the guard-room.

Rake learnt the stern necessity of the law, which, for

the sake of *morale*, must make the soldiers, whose blood is wanted to be like fire on the field, patient, pulseless, and enduring of every provocation, cruelty, and insolence in the camp and the barrack, as though they were statues of stones,—a needful law, a wise law, an indispensable law, doubtless, but a very hard law to be obeyed by a man full of life and all life's passions.

At the court-martial on his mutinous conduct, which followed, many witnesses brought evidence, on being pressed, to the unpopularity of Warne in the regiment, and to his harshness and his tyranny to Rake. Many men spoke out what had been chained down in their thoughts for years; and, in consideration of the provocation received, the prisoner, who was much liked by the officers, was condemned to six months' imprisonment for his insubordination and blow to his superior officer, without being tied up to the triangles. At the court-martial, Cecil, who chanced to be in Brighton after Goodwood, was present one day with some other Guardsmen, and the look of Rake, with his cheerfulness under difficulties, his love for the hound, and his bright, sunburnt, shrewd, humorous countenance, took his fancy.

"Beauty" was the essence of good nature. Indolent himself, he hated to see anything or anybody worried; lazy, gentle, wayward, and spoilt by his own world, he was still never so selfish and philosophic as he pretended but what he would do a kindness if one came in his way; it is not a very great virtue, perhaps, but it is a rare one.

"Poor devil! struck the other because he wouldn't have his dog hanged. Well, on my word I should have done the same in his place, if I could have got up the pace for so much exertion," murmured Cecil to his cheroot, careless of the demoralizing tendency of his

remarks for the army in general. Had it occurred in the Guards, and he had "sat" on the case, Rake would have had one very lenient judge.

As it was, Bertie actually went the lengths of thinking seriously about the matter; he liked Rake's devotion to his dumb friend, and he heard of his intense popularity in his troop; he wished to save, if he could, so fine a fellow from the risks of his turbulent passion, and from the stern fetters of a trying discipline; hence, when Rake found himself condemned to his cell, he had a message sent him by Bertie's groom that when his term of punishment should be over, Mr. Cecil would buy his discharge from the Service and engage him as extra body-servant, having had a good account of his capabilities; he had taken the hound to his own kennels.

Now, the fellow had been thoroughly devil-me-care throughout the whole course of the proceedings, had heard his sentence with sublime impudence, and had chaffed his sentinels with an utterly reckless nonchalance; but somehow or other, when that message reached him, a vivid sense that he was a condemned and disgraced man suddenly flooded in on him; a passionate gratitude seized him to the young aristocrat who had thought of him in his destitution and condemnation, who had even thought of his dog; and Rake, the philosophic and the undauntable, could have found it in his heart to kneel down in the dust and kiss the stirrup-leather when he held it for his new master, so strong was the loyalty he bore from that moment to Bertie.

Martinets were scandalized at a Life Guardsman taking as his private valet a man who had been guilty of such conduct in the Light Cavalry; but Cecil never troubled his head about what people said; and so invaluable did Rake speedily become to him, that he had

kept him about his person wherever he went from then until now, two years after.

Rake loved his master with a fidelity very rare in these days; he loved his horses, his dogs, everything that was his, down to his very rifle and boots, slaved for him cheerfully, and was as proud of the deer he stalked, of the brace he bagged, of his winnings when the Household played the Zingari, or his victory when his yacht won the Cherbourg Cup, as though those successes had been Rake's own.

"My dear Seraph," said Cecil himself once on this point to the Marquis, "if you want generosity, fidelity, and all the rest of the cardinal what-d'ye-call-ems—sins, ain't it?—go to a noble-hearted Scamp; *he*'ll stick to you till he kills himself. If you want to be cheated, get a Respectable Immaculate; *he*'ll swindle you piously, and decamp with your Doncaster Vase."

And Rake, who assuredly had been an out-and-out scamp, made good Bertie's creed; he "stuck to him" devoutly, and no terrier was ever more alive to an otter than he was to the Guardsman's interests. It was that very vigilance which made him, as he rode back from the Zu-Zu's in the twilight, notice what would have escaped any save one who had been practised as a trapper in the red Canadian woods, namely, the head of a man almost hidden among the heavy though leafless brushwood and the yellow gorse of a spinney which lay on his left in Royallieu Park. Rake's eyes were telescopic and microscopic; moreover, they had been trained to know such little signs as a marsh from a hen harrier in full flight, by the length of wing and tail, and a widgeon or a coot from a mallard or a teal, by the depth each swam out of the water. Gray and foggy as it was, and

high as was the gorse, Rake recognized his born-foe Willon.

"What's he up to there?" thought Rake, surveying the place, which was wild, solitary, and an unlikely place enough for a head groom to be found in. "If he ain't a rascal, I never see one; it's my belief he cheats the stable thick and thin, and gets on Mr. Cecil's mounts to a good tune—ay, and would nobble 'em as soon as not, if it just suited his book; that blessed King hates the man; how he lashes his heels at him!"

It was certainly possible that Willon might be passing an idle hour in potting rabbits, or be otherwise innocently engaged enough; but the sight of him there among the gorse was a sight of suspicion to Rake. Instantaneous thoughts darted through his mind of tethering his horse, and making a reconnoissance safely and unseen with the science at stalking brute or man that he had learnt of his friends the Sioux. But second thoughts showed him this was impossible. The horse he was on was a mere colt just breaking in, who had barely had so much as a "dumb jockey" on his back, and stand for a second the colt would not.

"At any rate, I'll unearth him," thought Rake, with his latent animosity to the head groom, and his vigilant loyalty to Cecil overruling any scruple as to his right to overlook his foe's movements; and with a gallop that was muffled on the heather'd turf he dashed straight at the covert unperceived till he was within ten paces. Willon started and looked up hastily; he was talking to a square-built man very quietly dressed in shepherd's plaid, chiefly remarkable by a red-hued beard and whiskers.

The groom turned pale, and laughed nervously as Rake pulled up with a jerk.

"You on that young 'un again? Take care you don't get bucked out o' saddle in the shape of a cocked hat."

"*I* ain't afraid of going to grass, if you are!" retorted Rake, scornfully; boldness was not his enemy's strong point. "Who's your pal, old fellow?"

"A cousin o' mine, out o' Yorkshire," vouchsafed Mr. Willon, looking anything but easy, while the cousin aforesaid nodded sulkily on the introduction.

"Ah! looks like a Yorkshire tyke," muttered Rake, with a volume of meaning condensed in these innocent words. "A nice, dry, cheerful sort of place to meet your cousin in, too; uncommon lively; hope it'll raise his spirits to see all *his* cousins a grinning there; his spirits don't seem much in sorts now," continued the ruthless inquisitor, with a glance at the "keeper's tree" by which they stood, in the middle of dank undergrowth, whose branches were adorned with dead cats, curs, owls, kestrels, stoats, weasels, and martens. To what issue the passage of arms might have come it is impossible to say, for at that moment the colt took matters into his own hands, and bolted with a rush, that even Rake could not pull in till he had had a mile-long "pipe-opener."

"Something up there," thought that sagacious rough-rider; "if that red-haired chap ain't a rum lot, I'll eat him. I've seen his face, too, somewhere; where the deuce was it? Cousin; yes, cousins in Queer Street, I dare say! Why should he go and meet his 'cousin' out in the fog there, when if you took twenty cousins home to the servants' hall nobody'd ever say anything? If that Willon ain't as deep as Old Harry——"

And Rake rode into the stable-yard, thoughtful and intensely suspicious of the rendezvous under the keeper's tree in the outlying coverts. He would have been more so had he guessed that Ben Davis's red beard and demure

attire with other as efficient disguises, had prevented even his own keen eyes from penetrating the identity of Willon's "cousin" with the Welcher he had seen thrust off the course the day before by his master.

CHAPTER VI.

The End of a Ringing Run.

"Tally-ho! is the word, clap spurs and let's follow,
The world has no charm like a rattling view-halloa!"

Is hardly to be denied by anybody in this land of fast bursts and gallant M.F.H.'s, whether they "ride to hunt," or "hunt to ride," in the immortal distinction of Assheton Smith's old whip: the latter class, by-the-by, becoming far and away the larger, in these days of rattling gallops and desperate breathers. Who cares to patter after a sly old dog-fox, that, fat and wary, leads the pack a tedious interminable wind in and out through gorse and spinney, bricks himself up in a drain, and takes an hour to be dug out, dodges about till twilight, and makes the hounds pick the scent slowly and wretchedly over marsh and through water? Who would not give fifty guineas a second for the glorious thirty minutes of *racing* that show steam and steel over fence and fallow in a clipping rush without a check from find to finish? So be it ever! The riding that graces the Shires, that makes Tedworth and Pytchley, the Duke's and the Fitzwilliam's, household words and "names beloved," that fills Melton and Market Harborough, and makes the best flirts of the ball-room gallop fifteen miles to covert, careless of hail or rain, mire or slush, mist or cold, so long as it is a fine scenting wind, is the same riding that sent the Six Hundred down into the blaze of the Muscovite guns, that in our father's days gave to Grant's Hussars their

swoop, like eagles, on to the rear-guard at Morales, and that in the grand old East and the rich trackless West, makes exiled campaigners with high English names seek and win an *aristeia* of their own at the head of their wild Irregular Horse, who would charge hell itself at their bidding.

Now in all the Service there was not a man who loved hunting better than Bertie. Though he was incorrigibly lazy, and inconceivably effeminate in every one of his habits, though he suggested a portable lounging-chair as an improvement at battues so that you might shoot sitting, drove to every breakfast and garden party in the season in his brougham with the blinds down lest a grain of dust should touch him, thought a waltz too exhaustive, and a saunter down Pall Mall too tiring, and asked to have the end of a novel told him in the clubs because it was too much trouble to read on a warm day, —though he was more indolent than any spoiled Creole, "Beauty" never failed to head the first flight, and adored a hard day cross country, with an east wind in his eyes and the sleet in his teeth. The only trouble was to make him get up in time for it.

"Mr. Cecil, sir, if you please, the drag will be round in ten minutes," said Rake, with a dash of desperation for the seventh time into his chamber, one fine scenting morning.

"I don't please," answered Cecil, sleepily, finishing his cup of coffee, and reading a novel of La Demirep's.

"The other gentlemen are all down, sir, and you will be too late."

"Not a bit. They must wait for me," yawned Bertie.

Crash came the Seraph's thunder on the panels of the door, and a strong volume of Turkish through the keyhole: "Beauty, Beauty, are you dead?"

"Now, what an inconsequent question!" expostulated Cecil, with appealing rebuke. "If a fellow *were* dead, how the devil could he say he was? Do be logical, Seraph."

"Get up!" cried the Seraph with a deafening rataplan, and a final dash of his colossal stature into the chamber. "We've all done breakfast; the traps are coming round; you'll be an hour behind time at the meet."

Bertie lifted his eyes with plaintive resignation from the Demirep's yellow-papered romance.

"I'm really in an interesting chapter: Aglae has just had a marquis kill his son, and two brothers kill each other in the Bois, about her, and is on the point of discovering a man she's in love with to be her own grandfather; the complication is absolutely thrilling," murmured Beauty, whom nothing could ever "thrill," not even plunging down the Matterhorn, losing "long odds in thou'" over the Oaks, or being sunned in the eyes of the fairest woman of Europe.

The Seraph laughed, and tossed the volume straight to the other end of the chamber.

"Confound you, Beauty, get up!"

"Never swear, Seraph, not ever so mildly," yawned Cecil; "it's gone out, you know; only the cads and the clergy can damn one nowadays; it's such bad style to be so impulsive. Look! you have broken the back of my Demirep!"

"You deserve to break the King's back over the first cropper," laughed the Seraph. "Do get up!"

"Brother," sighed the victim, raising himself with reluctance, while the Seraph disappeared in a cloud of Turkish.

Neither Bertie's indolence nor his *insouciance* were assumed; utter carelessness was his nature, utter impassability was his habit, and he was truly for the moment loth

to leave his bed, his coffee, and his novel; he must have his leg over the saddle, and feel the strain on his arms of that "pulling" pace with which the King always went when once he settled into his stride, before he would really think about winning.

The hunting breakfasts of our forefathers and of our present squires found no favour with Bertie; a slice of game and a glass of Curaçoa were all he kept the drag waiting to swallow, and the four bays going at a pelting pace, he and the rest of the Household who were gathered at Royallieu were by good luck in time for the throw-off of the Quorn, where the hero of the Blue Ribbon was dancing impatiently under Willon's hand, scenting the fresh, keen, sunny air, and knowing as well what all those bits of scarlet straying in through field and lane, gate and gap, meant, as well as though the merry notes of the master's horn were winding over the gorse. The meet was brilliant and very large; showing such a gathering as only the Melton country can; and foremost among the crowd of carriages, hacks, and hunters, were the beautiful roan mare Vivándière of the Lady Guenevere, mounted by that exquisite peeress in her violet habit, and her tiny velvet hat; and the pony equipage of the Zu-Zu, all glittering with azure and silver, leopard rugs, and snowy reins: the breadth of half an acre of grassland was between them, but the groups of men about them were tolerably equal for number and for rank.

"Take Zu-Zu off my hands for this morning, Seraph, there's a good fellow," murmured Cecil, as he swung himself into saddle. The Seraph gave a leonine growl, sighed, and acquiesced. He detested women in the hunting-field, but that sweetest tempered giant of the Brigades never refused anything to anybody—much less to "Beauty."

To an uninitiated mind it would have seemed marvellous and beautiful in its combination of simplicity and intricacy, to have noted the delicate tactics with which Bertie conducted himself between his two claimants;—bending to his Countess with a reverent devotion that assuaged whatever of incensed perception of her unacknowledged rival might be silently lurking in her proud heart; wheeling up to the pony-trap under cover of speaking to the men from Egerton Lodge, and restoring the Zu-Zu from sulkiness, by a propitiatory offer of a little gold sherry-flask, studded with turquoises, just ordered for her from Regent Street, which, however, she ungraciously contemned, because she thought it had only cost twenty guineas; anchoring the victimized Seraph beside her by an adroit "Ah! by-the-way, Rock, give Zu-Zu one of your rose-scented *papelitos*; she's been wild to smoke them;" and leaving the Zu-Zu content at securing a future Duke, was free to canter back and flirt on the off-side of Vivandière, till the "signal," the "cast," made with consummate craft, the waving of the white sterns among the brushwood, the tightening of girths, the throwing away of cigars, the challenge, the whimper, and the "stole away!" sent the field headlong down the course after as fine a long-legged greyhound fox as ever carried a brush.

Away he went in a rattling spin, breaking straight at once for the open, the hounds on the scent like mad: with a tally-ho that thundered through the cloudless, crisp, cold, glittering noon, the field dashed off pell-mell, the violet habit of her ladyship, and the azure skirts of the Zu-Zu foremost of all in the rush through the spinneys; while Cecil on the King, and the Seraph on a magnificent white weight-carrier, as thoroughbred and colossal as himself, led the way with them. The scent

was hot as death in the spinneys, and the pack raced till nothing but a good one could live with them; few but good ones, however, were to be found with the Quorn, and the field held together superbly over the first fence, and on across the grassland, the game old fox giving no sign of going to covert, but running straight as a crow flies, while the pace grew terrific.

"Beats cock-fighting!" cried the Zu-Zu, while her blue skirts fluttered in the wind, as she lifted Cecil's brown mare, very cleverly, over a bilberry hedge, and set her little white teeth with a will on the Seraph's otto-of-rose cigarette. Lady Guenevere heard the words as Vivandière rose in the air with the light bound of a roe, and a slight superb dash of scorn came into her haughty eyes for the moment; she never seemed to know that "that person" in the azure habit even existed, but the contempt awoke in her, and shone in her glance, while she rode on as that fair leader of the Belvoir and Pytchley alone could ride over the fallows.

The steam was on at full pressure, the hounds held close to his brush, heads up sterns down, running still straight as an arrow over the open, past coppice and covert, through gorse and spinney, without a sign of the fox making for shelter. Fence and double, hedge and brook, soon scattered the field; straying off far and wide, and coming to grief with lots of "downers," it grew select and few but the crack men could keep the hounds in view. "Catch 'em who can," was the one *mot d'ordre*, for they were literally racing, the line-hunters never losing the scent a second, as the fox, taking to dodging, made all the trouble he could for them through the rides of the woods. Their working was magnificent, and, heading him, they ran him round and round in a ring, viewed him for a second, and drove him out of covert once more

into the pastures, while they laid on at a hotter scent and flew after him like staghounds.

Only half a dozen were up with them now; the pace was tremendous, though all over grass; here a flight of posts and rails tried the muscle of the boldest; there a bullfinch yawned behind the blackthorn; here a big fence towered; there a brook rushed angrily among its rushes; while the keen, easterly wind blew over the meadows, and the pack screamed along like the white trail of a plume. Cecil "showed the way" with the self-same stride and the self-same fencing as had won him the Vase. Lady Guenevere and the Seraph were running almost even with him; three of the Household farther down; the Zu-Zu and some Melton men two meadows off; the rest of the field, nowhere. Fifty-two minutes had gone by in that splendid running, without a single check, while the fox raced as gamely and as fast as at the find; the speed was like lightning past the brown woods, the dark-green pine plantations, the hedges, bright with scarlet berries; through the green low-lying grasslands, and the winding drives of coverts, and the boles of ash-hued beech trunks, whose roots the violets were just purpling with their blossom; while far away stretched the blue haze of the distance, and above-head a flight of rooks cawed merrily in the bright air, soon left far off as the pack swept onward in the most brilliant thing of the hunting year.

"Water! take care!" cried Cecil, with a warning wave of his hand as the hounds with a splash like a torrent dashed up to their necks in a broad brawling brook that Reynard had swam in first style, and struggled as best they could after him. It was an awkward bit, with bad taking-off and a villainous mud-bank for landing; and the water, thickened and swollen with recent rains, had

made all the land that sloped to it miry and soft as sponge. It was the risk of life and limb to try it; but all who still viewed the hounds, catching Bertie's shout of warning, worked their horses up for it, and charged toward it as hotly as troops charge a square. Forest King was over like a bird; the winner of the Grand Military was not to be daunted by all the puny streams of the Shires; the artistic riding of the Countess landed Vivandière, with a beautiful clear spring, after him by a couple of lengths: the Seraph's handsome white hunter, brought up at a headlong gallop with characteristic careless dash and fine science mingled, cleared it; but, falling with a mighty crash, gave him a purler on the opposite side, and was within an ace of striking him dead with his hoof in frantic struggles to recover. The Seraph, however, was on his legs with a rapidity marvellous in a six-foot-three son of Anak, picked up the horse, threw himself into saddle, and dashed off again quick as lightning, with his scarlet stained all over, and his long fair moustaches floating in the wind. The Zu-Zu turned Mother of Pearl back with a fiery French oath; she hated to be "cut down," but she liked still less to risk her neck; and two of the Household were already treated to "crackers" that disabled them for the day, while one Melton man was pitched head-foremost into the brook, and another was sitting dolorously on the bank with his horse's head in his lap, and the poor brute's spine broken. There were only three of the first riders in England now alone with the hounds, who, with a cold scent as the fox led them through the angular corner of a thick pheasant covert, stuck like wax to the line, and working him out, viewed him once more, for one wild, breathless, tantalizing second, and, on a scent breast-high, raced him with the rush of an express through the straggling street

of a little hamlet, and got him out again on the level pastures and across a fine line of hunting country, with the leafless woods and the low gates of a park far away to their westward.

"A guinea to a shilling that we kill him," cried the flute-voice of her brilliant ladyship, as she ran a moment side by side with Forest King, and flashed her rich eyes on his rider; she had scorned the Zu-Zu, but on occasion she would use betting slang and racing slang with the daintiest grace in the world herself without their polluting her lips. As though the old fox heard the wager, he swept in a bend round toward the woods on the right, making, with all the craft and the speed there were in him, for the deep shelter of the boxwood and laurel. "After him, my beauties, my beauties—if he run there he'll go to ground and save his brush!" thundered the Seraph as though he were hunting his own hounds at Lyonnesse, who knew every tone of his rich clarion notes as well as they knew every wind of his horn. But the young ones of the pack saw Reynard's move and his meaning as quickly as he did; having run fast before, they flew now: the pace was terrific. Two fences were crossed as though they were paper; the meadows raced with lightning speed, a ha-ha leaped, a gate cleared with a crashing jump, and in all the furious excitement of "view," they tore down the mile-long length of an avenue, dashed into a flower-garden, and smashing through a gay trellis-work of scarlet creeper, plunged into the home-paddock and killed with as loud a shout ringing over the country in the bright sunny day as ever was echoed by the ringing cheers of the Shire; Cecil, the Seraph, and her victorious ladyship alone coming in for the glories of the "finish."

"Never had a faster seventy minutes up-wind," said

Lady Guenevere, looking at the tiny jewelled watch, the size of a sixpence, that was set in the handle of her whip, as the brush, with all the compliments customary, was handed to her. She had won twenty before.

The park, so unceremoniously entered, belonged to a baronet, who, though he hunted little himself, honored the sport and scorned a vulpecide; he came out naturally and begged them to lunch. Lady Guenevere refused to dismount, but consented to take a biscuit and a little Lafitte, while clarets, liqueurs, and ales, with anything else they wanted, were brought to her companions. The stragglers strayed in; the M. F. H. came up just too late; the men getting down, gathered about the Countess or lounged on the gray stone steps of the Elizabethan house. The sun shone brightly on the oriel casements, the antique gables, the twisted chimneys, all covered with crimson parasites and trailing ivy; the horses, the scarlet, the pack in the paddock adjacent, the shrubberies of laurel and araucaria, the sun-tinted terraces, made a bright and picturesque grouping. Bertie, with his hand on Vivandière's pommel, after taking a deep draught of sparkling Rhenish, looked on at it all with a pleasant sigh of amusement.

"By Jove," he murmured softly, with a contented smile about his lips, "that *was* a ringing run!"

At that very moment, as the words were spoken, a groom approached him hastily; his young brother, whom he had scarcely seen since the find, had been thrown and taken home on a hurdle; the injuries were rumored to be serious.

Bertie's smile faded; he looked very grave: world-spoiled as he was, reckless in everything, and egotist though he had long been by profession, he loved the lad.

When he entered the darkened room, with its faint chloroform odor, the boy lay like one dead, his bright hair scattered on the pillow, his chest bare, and his right arm broken and splintered. The deathlike coma was but the result of the chloroform; but Cecil never stayed to ask or remember that: he was by the couch in a single stride, and dropped down by it, his head bent on his arms.

"It is my fault. I should have looked to him."

The words were very low; he hated that any should see he could still be such a fool as to *feel*. A minute, and he conquered himself; he rose, and with his hand on the boy's fair tumbled curls, turned calmly to the medical men who, attached to the household, had been on the spot at once.

"What is the matter?"

"Fractured arm, contusion, nothing serious, nothing at all, at his age," replied the surgeon; "when he wakes out of the lethargy he will tell you so himself, Mr. Cecil."

"You are certain?"—do what he would his voice shook a little; his hand had not shaken, two days before, when nothing less than ruin or ransom had hung on his losing or winning the race.

"Perfectly certain," answered the surgeon cheerfully. "He is not overstrong, to be sure, but the contusions are slight; he will be out of that bed in a fortnight."

"How did he fall?"

But while they told him he scarcely heard; he was looking at the handsome Antinous-like form of the lad as it lay stretched helpless and stricken before him; and he was remembering the death-bed of their mother, when the only voice he had ever reverenced had whispered, as

she pointed to the little child of three summers:—"When you are a man, take care of him, Bertie." How had he fulfilled the injunction? Into how much brilliantly-tinted evil had he not led him—by example at least?

The surgeon touched his arm apologetically, after a lengthened silence:

"Your brother will be best unexcited when he comes to himself, sir; look—his eyes are unclosing now. Could you do me the favor to go to his lordship? His grief made him perfectly wild—so dangerous to his life at his age. We could only persuade him to retire, a few minutes ago, on the plea of Mr. Berkeley's safety. If you could see him——"

Cecil went, mechanically almost, and with a grave, weary depression on him; he was so unaccustomed to think at all, so utterly unaccustomed to think painfully, that he scarcely knew what ailed him. Had he had his old tact about him, he would have known how worse than useless it would be for *him* to seek his father in such a moment.

Lord Royallieu was lying back exhausted as Cecil opened the door of his private apartments, heavily darkened and heavily perfumed; at the turn of the lock he started up eagerly.

"What news of him?"

"Good news, I hope," said Cecil gently, as he came forward. "The injuries are not grave, they tell me. I am so sorry that I never watched his fencing, but——"

The old man had not recognized him till he heard his voice, and he waved him off with a fierce contemptuous gesture; the grief for his favorite's danger, the wild terrors that his fears had conjured up, his almost frantic agony at the sight of the accident, had lashed him into passion well-nigh delirious.

"Out of my sight, sir," he said fiercely, his mellow tones quivering with rage. "I wish to God you had been dead in a ditch before a hair of my boy's had been touched. You live, and he lies dying there!"

Cecil bowed in silence; the brutality of the words wounded, but they did not offend him, for he knew his father was in that moment scarce better than a maniac, and he was touched with the haggard misery upon the old Peer's face.

"Out of my sight, sir," re-echoed Lord Royallieu as he strode forward, passion lending vigor to his emaciated frame, while the dignity of his grand carriage blent with the furious force of his infuriated blindness. "If you had had the heart of a man you would have saved such a child as that from his peril; warned him, watched him, succored him at least when he fell. Instead of that, you ride on and leave him to die, if death comes to him! *You* are safe, you are always safe. You try to kill yourself with every vice under heaven, and only get more strength, more grace, more pleasure from it—you are always safe because I hate you. Yes! I hate you, sir!"

No words can give the force, the malignity, the concentrated meaning with which the words were hurled out, as the majestic form of the old Lord towered in the shadow, with his hands outstretched as if in imprecation.

Cecil heard him in silence, doubting if he could hear aright, while the bitter phrases scathed and cut like scourges, but he bowed once more with the manner that was as inseparable from him as his nature.

"Hate is so very exhausting; I regret I give you the trouble of it. May I ask why you favor me with it?"

"You may!" thundered his father, while his hawk's eyes flashed their glittering fire. "You are like the man I cursed living and curse dead. You look at me with

Alan Bertie's eyes, you speak to me with Alan Bertie's voice; I loved your mother, I worshipped her; but—you are his son, not mine!"

The secret doubt, treasured so long, was told at last. The blood flushed Bertie's face a deep and burning scarlet; he started with an irrepressible tremor, like a man struck with a shot; he felt like one suddenly stabbed in the dark by a sure and a cruel hand. The insult and the amazement of the words seemed to paralyse him for the moment, the next he recovered himself, and lifted his head with as haughty a gesture as his father's; his features were perfectly composed again, and sterner than in all his careless, easy life they ever yet had looked.

"You lie, and you know that you lie. My mother was pure as the angels. Henceforth you can be only to me a slanderer who has dared to taint the one name holy in my sight."

And without another word, he turned and went out of the chamber. Yet, as the door closed, old habit was so strong on him that, even in his hot and bitter pain, and his bewildered sense of sudden outrage, he almost smiled at himself. "It is a mania; he does not know what he says," he thought. "How could *I* be so melodramatic? We were like two men at the Porte St. Martin. Inflated language *is* such a bad form!"

But the cruel stroke had not struck the less closely home, and gentle though his nature was, beyond all forgiveness from him was the dishonor of his mother's memory.

CHAPTER VII.

After a Richmond Dinner.

It was the height of the season, and the duties of the Household were proportionately and insupportably heavy. The Brigades were fairly worked to death, and the Indian service, in the heat of the Affghan war, was never more onerous than the campaigns that claimed the Guards from Derby to Ducal.

Escorts to Levees, guards of honor to Drawing-rooms, or field-days in the Park and the Scrubs, were but the least portion of it. Far more severe, and still less to be shirked, were the morning exercise in the Ride; the daily parade in the Lady's Mile; the reconnoissances from club windows, the videttes at Flirtation Corner; the long campaigns at mess-breakfasts, with the study of dice and baccarât tactics, and the fortifications of Strasburg pâté against the invasions of Chartreuse and Chambertin; the breathless, steady charges of Belgravian staircases when a fashionable drum beat the rataplan; the skirmishes with sharp-shooters of the bright-armed Irregular Lances; the foraging-duty when fair commanders wanted ices or strawberries at garden parties; the ball-practice at Hornsey Handicaps; the terrible risk of crossing into the enemy's lines, and being made to surrender as prisoners of war at the jails of St. George's, or of St. Paul's Knightsbridge; the constant inspections of the Flying Battalions of the Ballet, and the pickets afterward in the Wood of St. John; the anxieties of the Club commissariats, and the close vigilance over the mess wines; the fatigue duty of ball-rooms, and the continual unharnessing consequent on the clause in the Regulations never to wear the same gloves twice; all these, without counting the close battles

of the Corner and the unremitting requirements of the Turf, worked the First Life and the rest of the Brigades, Horse and Foot, so hard and incessantly that some almost thought of changing into the dreary depôt of St. Stephen's; and one mutinous Coldstreamer was even rash enough and false enough to his colors to meditate deserting to the enemy's camp, and giving himself up at St. George's —"because a fellow once hanged is let alone, you know!"

The Household were very hard pressed through the season—a crowded and brilliant one; and Cecil was in request most of all. Bertie, somehow or other, was the fashion—marvellous and indefinable word, that gives a more powerful crown than thrones, blood, beauty, or intellect can ever bestow. And no list was "the thing" without his name, no reception, no garden party, no opera-box, or private concert, or rose-shadowed boudoir, fashionably *affiché* without being visited by him. How he, in especial, had got his reputation it would have been hard to say, unless it were that he dressed a shade more perfectly than any one, and with such inimitable carelessness in the perfection, too, and had an almost unattainable matchlessness in the *sang froid* of his soft, languid insolence, and incredible though ever gentle effrontery. However gained, he had it: and his beautiful hack Sahara, his mail-phaeton with two blood grays dancing in impatience over the stones, or his little dark-green brougham for night-work, were, one or another of them, always seen from two in the day till four or five in the dawn about the park or the town.

And yet this season, while he made a prima donna by a bravissima, introduced a new tie by an evening's wear, gave a cook the cordon with his praise, and rendered a fresh-invented liqueur the rage by his recommendation, Bertie knew very well that he was ruined.

The breach between his father and himself was irrevocable. He had left Royallieu as soon as his guests had quitted it, and young Berkeley was out of all danger. He had long known he could look for no help from the old lord, or from his elder brother, the heir; and now every chance of it was hopelessly closed; nothing but the whim or the will of those who held his floating paper, and the tradesmen who had his name on their books at compound interest of the heaviest, stood between him and the fatal hour when he must "send in his papers to sell," and be "nowhere" in the great race of life.

He knew that a season, a month, a day, might be the only respite left him, the only pause for him betwixt his glittering luxurious world and the fiat of outlawry and exile. He knew that the Jews might be down on him any night that he sat at the Guards' mess, flirted with foreign princesses, or laughed at the gossamer gossip of the town over iced drinks in the clubs. His liabilities were tremendous, his resources totally exhausted; but such was the latent recklessness of the careless Royallieu blood, and such the languid devil-may-care of his training and his temper, that the knowledge scarcely ever seriously disturbed his enjoyment of the moment. Somehow, he never realized it.

If any weatherwise had told the Lisbon people of the coming of the great earthquake, do you think they could have brought themselves to realize that midnight darkness, that yawning desolation which were nigh, while the sun was still so bright and the sea so tranquil, and the bloom so sweet on purple pomegranate and amber grape, and the scarlet of odorous flowers, and the blush of a girl's kiss-warmed cheek?

A sentimental metaphor with which to compare the difficulties of a dandy of the Household, because his

"stiff" was floating about in too many directions at too many high figures, and he had hardly enough till next pay-day came round to purchase the bouquets he sent and meet the club-fees that were due! But, after all, may it not well be doubted if a sharp shock and a second's blindness, and a sudden sweep down under the walls of the Cathedral or the waters of the Tagus, were not, on the whole, a quicker and pleasanter mode of extinction than that social earthquake—"gone to the bad with a crash!" And the Lisbonites did not more disbelieve in, and dream less of their coming ruin, than Cecil did his, while he was doing the season, with engagements enough in a night to spread over a month, the best horses in the town, a dozen rose-notes sent to his clubs or his lodgings in a day, and the newest thing in soups, colts, beauties, neckties, perfumes, tobaccos, or square dances, waiting his dictum to become the fashion.

"How you *do* go on with those women, Beauty," growled the Seraph, one day after a morning of fearful hard work consequent on having played the Foot Guards at Lord's, and, in an unwary moment, having allowed himself to be decoyed afterward to a private concert, and very nearly proposed to in consequence, during a Symphony in A; an impending terror from which he could hardly restore himself by puffing Turkish like a steam engine, to assure himself of his jeopardised safety. "You're horribly imprudent!"

"Not a bit of it," rejoined Beauty, serenely. "That is the superior wisdom and beautiful simplicity of making love to your neighbor's wife;—she can't marry you!"

"But she may get you into the D. C.," mused the Seraph, who had gloomy personal recollection of having been twice through that phase of law and life, and of

having been enormously mulcted in damages because he was a Duke *in futuro*, and because, as he piteously observed on the occasion, "You couldn't make that fellow Cresswell see that it was *they* ran away with *me* each time!"

"Oh! everybody goes through the D. C. somehow or other," answered Cecil, with philosophy. "It's like the Church, the Commons, and the Gallows, you know—one of the popular Institutions."

"And it's the only Law Court where the robber cuts a better figure than the robbed," laughed the Seraph, consoling himself that he had escaped the future chance of showing in the latter class of marital defrauded, by shying that proposal during the Symphony in A, on which his thoughts ran, as the thoughts of one who has just escaped from an Alpine crevasse, run on the past abyss in which he has been so nearly lost for ever. "I say, Beauty, were you ever near doing anything serious —asking anybody to marry you, eh? I suppose you have been—they do make such awful hard running on one!" and the poor hunted Seraph stretched his magnificent limbs with the sigh of a martyred innocent.

"I was once—only once!"

"Ah, by Jove! and what saved you?"

The Seraph lifted himself a little, with a sort of pitying sympathizing curiosity toward a fellow-sufferer.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Bertie, with a sigh as of a man who hated long sentences, and who was about to plunge into a painful past. "It's ages ago; day I was at a Drawing-room; year Blue Ruin won the Clearwell for Royal, I think. Wedged up there, in that poking place, I saw *such* a face—the deuce, it almost makes me feel enthusiastic now. She was just out—an angel with a train! She had delicious eyes—like a spaniel's you

know—a cheek like this peach, and lips like that strawberry, there, on the top of your ice. She looked at me, and I was in love! I knew who she was—Irish lord's daughter—girl I could have had for the asking; and I vow that I thought I *would* ask her—I actually was as far gone as that, I actually said to myself, I'd hang about her a week or two, and then propose. You'll hardly believe it, but I did! Watched her presented; such grace, such a smile, such a divine lift of the lashes. I was really in love, and with a girl who would marry me! I was never so near a fatal thing in my life——"

"Well?" asked the Seraph, pausing to listen till he let the ice in his sherry-cobbler melt away: when you have been so near breaking your neck down the Matrimonial Matterhorn, it is painfully interesting to hear how your friend escaped the same risks of descent.

"Well," resumed Bertie, "I was *very* near it. I did nothing but watch her; she saw me, and I felt she was as flattered and as touched as she ought to be. She blushed most enchantingly; just enough, you know; she was conscious I followed her; I contrived to get close to her as she passed out, so close that I could see those exquisite eyes lighten and gleam, those exquisite lips part with a sigh; that beautiful face beam with the sunshine of a radiant smile. It was the dawn of love I had taught her! I pressed nearer and nearer, and I caught her soft whisper as she leaned to her mother: '*Mamma, I'm so hungry! I could eat a whole chicken!*' The sigh, the smile, the blush, the light, were for her dinner—not for me! The spell was broken for ever. A girl whom *I* had looked at could think of wings and merry-thoughts and white sauce! I have never been near a proposal again."

The Seraph, with the clarion roll of his gay laughter, flung a hautboy at him.

"Hang you, Beauty! If I didn't think you were going to tell one how you really got out of a serious thing; it is so awfully difficult to keep clear of them now-a-days. Those before-dinner teas are only just so many new traps! What became of her—eh?"

"She married a Scotch laird and became socially extinct, somewhere among the Hebrides. Served her right," murmured Cecil, sententiously. "Only think what she lost just through hungering for a chicken; if I hadn't have proposed for her, for one hardly keeps the screw up to such self-sacrifice as *that* when one is cool the next morning, I would have made her the fashion!"

With which masterly description in one phrase of all he could have done for the ill-starred débutante who had been hungry in the wrong place, Cecil lounged out of the club to drive with half a dozen of his set to a water-party—a Bacchanalian water-party, with the Zu-Zu and her sisters for the Naiads and the Household for their Tritons.

A water-party whose water element apparently consisted in driving down to Richmond, dining at nine, being three hours over the courses, contributing seven guineas a piece for the repast, listening to the songs of the Café Alcazar, reproduced with matchless *élan* by a pretty French actress, being pelted with brandy cherries by the Zu-Zu, seeing their best cigars thrown away half-smoked by pretty pillagers, and driving back again to town in the soft starry night, with the gay rhythms ringing from the box-seat as the leaders dashed along in a stretching gallop down the Kew Road. It certainly had no other more aquatic feature in it save a little drifting about for twenty minutes before dining, in toy boats and punts, as the sun was setting, while Laura Lelas, the

brunette actress, sang a barcarolle that would have been worthy of medieval

"Venice, and her people, only born to bloom and drop."

It did not set Cecil thinking, however, after Browning's fashion,

"Where be all those
Dear dead women,' with such hair too, what's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old;"

because, in the first place, it was a canon with him never to think at all; in the second, if put to it he would have averred that he knew nothing of Venice, except that it was a musty old bore of a place, where they worried you about visas and luggage and all that, chloride of lim'd you if you came from the East, and couldn't give you a mount if it were ever so; and in the third, instead of longing for the dear dead women, he was entirely contented with the lovely living ones who were at that moment puffing the smoke of his scented cigarettes into his eyes, making him eat lobster drowned in Chablis, or pelting him with bonbons.

As they left the Star and Garter, Laura Lelas, mounted on Cecil's box-seat, remembered she had dropped her cashmere in the dining-room. A cashmere is a Parisian's soul, idol, and fetish; servants could not find it; Cecil, who, to do him this justice, was always as courteous to a comédienne as to a countess, went himself. Passing the open windows of another room, he recognised the face of his little brother among a set of young Civil Service fellows, attachés, and cornets. They had no women with them; but they had brought what was perhaps worse—dice for hazard—and were turning the unconscious Star and Garter into an impromptu Crockford's over their wine.

Little Berke's pretty face was very flushed; his lips

were set tight, his eyes were glittering; the boy had the gambler's passion of the Royallieu blood in its hottest intensity. He was playing with a terrible eagerness that went to Bertie's heart with the same sort of pang of remorse with which he had looked on him when he had been thrown like dead on his bed at home.

Cecil stopped and leaned over the open window.

"Ah, young one, I did not know you were here. We are going home; will you come?" he asked, with a careless nod to the rest of the young fellows.

Berkeley looked up with a wayward, irritated annoyance.

"No, I can't," he said, irritably; "don't you see we are playing, Bertie?"

"I see," answered Cecil, with a dash of gravity, almost of sadness in him, as he leaned farther over the window-sill with his cigar in his teeth.

"Come away," he whispered kindly, as he almost touched the boy, who chanced to be close to the casement. "Hazard is the very deuce for anybody; and you know Royal hates it. Come with us, Berke: there's a capital set here, and I'm going to half a dozen good houses to-night, when we get back. I'll take you with me. Come! you like waltzing, and all that sort of thing, you know."

The lad shook himself peevishly; a sullen cloud over his fair, picturesque, boyish face.

"Let me alone before the fellows," he muttered impatiently. "I won't come, I tell you."

"*Soit!*"

Cecil shrugged his shoulders, left the window, found the Lelas' cashmere, and sauntered back to the drags without any more expostulation. The sweetness of his temper could never be annoyed, but also he never

troubled himself to utter useless words. Moreover, he had never been in his life much in earnest about anything; it was not worth while.

"A pretty fellow I am to turn preacher, when I have sins enough on my own shoulders for twenty," he thought, as he shook the ribbons and started the leaders off to the gay music of Laura Lelas' champagne-tuned laughter.

The thoughts that had crossed his mind when he had looked on his brother's inanimate form, had not been wholly forgotten since; he felt something like self-accusation whenever he saw, in some gray summer dawn, as he had seen now, the boy's bright face, haggard and pale with the premature miseries of the gamester, or heard his half-piteous, half-querulous lamentations over his losses; and he would essay, with all the consummate tact the world had taught him, to persuade him from his recklessness, and warn him of its consequences. But little Berke, though he loved his elder after a fashion, was wayward, selfish, and unstable as water. He would be very sorry sometimes, very repentant, and would promise anything under the sun; but five minutes afterward he would go his own way just the same, and be as irritably resentful of interference as a proud, spoiled, still-childish temper can be. And Cecil—the last man in the world to turn Mentor—would light a cheroot, as he did to-night, and forget all about it. The boy would be right enough when he had had his swing, he thought. Bertie's philosophy was the essence of *laissez faire*.

He would have defied a Manfred, or an Aylmer of Aylmer's Field, to be long pursued by remorse or care if he drank the right *cru* and lived in the right set. "If it be *very* severe," he would say, "it may give him a pang once a twelvemonth,—say the morning after a whitebait

dinner. Repentance is generally the fruit of indigestion, and contrition may generally be traced to too many truffles or olives."

Cecil had no time or space for thought; he never thought; would not have thought seriously for a kingdom. A novel, idly skimmed over in bed, was the extent of his literature; he never bored himself by reading the papers, he heard the news earlier than they told it; and as he lived, he was too constantly supplied from the world about him with amusement and variety to have to do anything beyond letting himself be amused: quietly fanned, as it were, with the lulling punkah of social pleasure, without even the trouble of pulling the strings. He had naturally considerable talents, and an almost dangerous facility in them; but he might have been as brainless as a mollusc for any exertion he gave his brain.

"If I were a professional diner-out, you know, I'd use such wits as I have: but why should I now?" he said on one occcasion, when a fair lady reproached him with this inertia. "The best style is only just to say yes and no —and be bored even in saying that—and a very comfortable style it is, too. You get amused without the trouble of opening your lips."

"But if everybody were equally monosyllabic, how then? you would not get amused," suggested his interrogator, a brilliant Parisienne.

"Well—everybody *is* pretty nearly," said Bertie; "but there are always a lot of fellows who give their wits to get their dinners—social rockets, you know—who will always fire themselves off to sparkle instead of you if you give them a white ball at the clubs, or get them a card for good houses. It saves you so much trouble; it is such a bore to have to talk."

He went that night, as he had said, to half a dozen good houses, midnight receptions, and after-midnight waltzes, making his bow in a Cabinet Minister's vestibule, and taking up the thread of the same flirtation at three different balls, showing himself for a moment at a Premier's At-home, and looking eminently graceful and pre-eminently weary in an ambassadress's drawing-room, and winding up the series by a dainty little supper in the gray of the morning, with a sparkling party of French actresses, as bright as the bubbles of their own Clicquot.

When he went up stairs to his own bed-room, in Piccadilly, about five o'clock, therefore, he was both sleepy and tired, and lamented to that cherished and ever-discreet confidant, a cheroot, the brutal demands of the Service, which would drag him off, in five hours' time, without the slightest regard to his feelings, to take share in the hot, heavy, dusty, scorching work of a field-day at the Scrubs.

"Here—get me to perch as quick as you can, Rake," he murmured, dropping into an arm-chair: astonished that Rake did not answer, he saw standing by him instead the boy Berkeley. Surprise was a weakness of raw inexperience that Cecil never felt; his gazette as Commander-in-Chief, or the presence of the Wandering Jew in his lodgings would never have excited it in him. In the first place, he would have merely lifted his eyebrows and said, "Be a fearful bore!" in the second he would have done the same, and murmured, "Queer old cad!"

Surprised, therefore, he was not, at the boy's untimely apparition; but his eyes dwelt on him with a mild wonder, while his lips dropped but one word:

"Amber-Amulet?"

Amber Amulet was a colt of the most marvellous promise at the Royallieu establishment, looked on to win the next Clearwell, Guineas, and Derby as a certainty. An accident to the young chestnut was the only thing that suggested itself as of possibly sufficient importance to make his brother wait for him at five o'clock on a June morning.

Berkeley looked up confusedly, impatiently:

"You are never thinking but of horses or women," he said, peevishly; "there may be other things in the world, surely."

"Indisputably there are other things in the world, dear boy, but none so much to my taste," said Cecil, composedly, stretching himself with a yawn. "With every regard to hospitality, and the charms of your society, might I hint that five o'clock in the morning is not precisely the most suitable hour for social visits and ethical questions?"

"For God's sake be serious, Bertie! I am the most miserable wretch in creation."

Cecil opened his closed eyes, with the sleepy indifference vanished from them, and a look of genuine and affectionate concern on the serene insouciance of his face.

"Ah, you *would* stay and play that chicken hazard," he thought, but he was not one who would have reminded the boy of his own advice and its rejection; he looked at him in silence a moment, then raised himself with a sigh.

"Dear boy, why didn't you sleep upon it? I never think of disagreeable things till they wake me with my coffee; then I take them up with the cup and put them down with it. You don't know how well it answers; it disposes of them wonderfully."

The boy lifted his head with a quick, reproachful anger, and in the gaslight his cheeks were flushed, his eyes full of tears.

"How brutal you are, Bertie! I tell you I am ruined, and you care no more than if you were a stone. You only think of yourself; you only live for yourself!"

He had forgotten the money that had been tossed to him off that very table the day before the Grand Military; he had forgotten the debts that had been paid for him out of the winnings of that very race. There is a childish, wayward, wailing temper, which never counts benefits received save as title-deeds by which to demand others. Cecil looked at him with just a shadow of regret, not reproachful enough to be rebuke, in his glance, but did not defend himself in any way against the boyish-passionate accusation, nor recall his own past gifts into remembrance.

"'Brutal!' What a word, little one. Nobody's brutal now; you never see that form now-a-days. Come, what is the worst this time?"

Berkeley looked sullenly down on the table where his elbows leaned, scattering the rose-notes, the French novels, the cigarettes, and the gold essence-bottles with which it was strewn; there was something dogged yet agitated, half-insolent yet half-timidly irresolute, upon him, that was new there.

"The worst is soon told," he said, huskily, and his teeth chattered together slightly as though with cold as he spoke: "I lost two hundred to-night; I must pay it, or be disgraced for ever; I have not a farthing; I cannot get the money for my life; no Jews will lend to me, I am under age; and—and——" his voice sank lower and grew more defiant, for he knew that the sole thing forbidden him peremptorily by both his father and his

brothers was the thing he had now to tell, "and—I borrowed three ponies of Granville Lee yesterday, as he came from the Corner with a lot of bank-notes after settling-day. I told him I would pay them to-morrow; I made sure I should have won to-night."

The piteous unreason of the born gamester, who clings so madly to the belief that luck must come to him, and acts on that belief as though a bank were his to lose his gold from, was never more utterly spoken in all its folly, in all its pitiable opticism, than now in the boy's confession.

Bertie started from his chair, his sleepy languor dissipated, on his face the look that had come there when Lord Royallieu had dishonoured his mother's name. In his code there was one shameless piece of utter and unmentionable degradation—it was to borrow of a friend.

"You will bring some disgrace on us before you die, Berkeley," he said, with a keener infliction of pain and contempt than had ever been in his voice. "Have you no common knowledge of honor?"

The lad flushed under the lash of the words, but it was a flush of anger rather than of shame; he did not lift his eyes, but gazed sullenly down on the yellow paper of a Paris romance he was irritably dog-earing.

"You are severe enough," he said, gloomily, and yet insolently. "Are you such a mirror of honor yourself? I suppose my debts at the worst are about one-fifth of yours."

For a moment even the sweetness of Cecil's temper almost gave way. Be his debts what they would, there was not one among them to his friends, or one for which the law could not seize him. He was silent; he did not wish to have a scene of dissension with one who was but a child to him; moreover, it was his nature to

abhor scenes of any sort, and to avert even a dispute, at any cost.

He came back and sat down without any change of expression, putting his cheroot in his mouth.

"*Très cher*, you are not courteous," he said, wearily, "but it may be that you are right. I am not a good one for you to copy from in anything, except the fit of my coats; I don't think I ever told you I was. I am not altogether so satisfied with myself as to suggest myself as a model for anything, unless it were to stand in a tailor's window in Bond Street to show the muffs how to dress. That isn't the point though; you say you want near 300*l.* by to-morrow—to-day rather. I can suggest nothing except to take the morning mail to the Shires, and ask Royal straight out; he never refuses you."

Berkeley looked at him with a bewildered terror that banished at a stroke his sullen defiance; he was irresolute as a girl, and keenly moved by fear.

"I would rather cut my throat," he said, with a wild exaggeration that was but the literal reflection of the trepidation on him; "as I live I would! I have had so much from him lately—you don't know how much—and now of all times, when they threaten to foreclose the mortgage on Royallieu——"

"What? foreclose what?"

"The mortgage!" answered Berkeley, impatiently; to his childish egotism it seemed cruel and intolerable that any extremities should be considered save his own. "You know the lands are mortgaged as deeply as Monti and the entail would allow them. They threatened to foreclose—I think that's the word—and Royal has had, God knows what work to stave them off; I no more dare face him, and ask him for a sovereign now, than I dare ask him to give me the gold plate off the sideboard."

Cecil listened gravely; it cut him more keenly than he showed to learn the evils and the ruin that so closely menaced his house; and to find how entirely his father's morbid mania against him severed him from all the interests and all the confidence of his family, and left him ignorant of matters even so nearly touching him as these.

"Your intelligence is not cheerful, little one," he said, with a languid stretch of his limbs; it was his nature to glide off painful subjects. "And—I really am sleepy! You think there is no hope Royal would help you?"

"I tell you I will shoot myself through the brain rather than ask him."

Bertie moved restlessly in the soft depths of his lounging-chair; he shunned worry, loathed it, escaped it at every portal, and here it came to him just when he wanted to go to sleep. He could not divest himself of the feeling that, had his own career been different, less extravagant, less dissipated, less indolently spendthrift, he might have exercised a better influence, and his brother's young life might have been more prudently launched upon the world. He felt, too, with a sharper pang than he had ever felt it for himself, the brilliant beggary in which he lived, the utter inability he had to raise even the sum that the boy now needed, a sum, so trifling in his set and with his habits, that he had betted it over and over again in a club-room on a single game of whist. It cut him with a bitter impatient pain; he was as generous as the winds, and there is no trial keener to such a temper than the poverty that paralyzes its power to give.

"It is no use to give you false hopes, young one," he said gently. "I can do nothing! You ought to know me by this time, and if you do, you know too that if

the money were mine, it should be yours at a word;—if you don't, no matter! Frankly, Berke, I am all down hill; my bills may be called in any moment; when they are I must send in my papers to sell, and cut the country, if my duns don't catch me before, which they probably will, in which event I shall be, to all intents and purposes—dead. This is not lively conversation, but you will do me the justice to say that it was not I who introduced it. Only—one word for all, my boy, understand this: if I could help you I would, cost what it might, but as matters stand—I *cannot*."

And with that Cecil puffed a great cloud of smoke to envelope him; the subject was painful, the denial wounded him by whom it had to be given full as much as it could wound him whom it refused. Berkeley heard it in silence, his head still hung down, his color changing, his hands nervously playing with the bouquet-bottles, shutting and opening their gold tops.

"No—yes—I know," he said hurriedly; "I have no right to expect it, and have been behaving like a cur, and—and—all that I know. But——there is one way you *could* save me, Bertie, if it isn't too much for a fellow to ask."

"I can't say I see the way, little one," said Cecil with a sigh. "What is it?"

"Why—look here. You see I'm not of age; my signature is of no use; they won't take it; else I could get money in no time on what must come to me when Royal dies; though 'tisn't enough to make the Jews 'melt' at a risk. Now—now—look here. I can't see that there could be any harm in it. You are such chums with Lord Rockingham, and he's as rich as all the Jews put together. What could there be in it if you just asked him to lend you a monkey for me? He'd do it in a

minute, because he'd give his head away to you—they all say so—and he'd never miss it. Now, Bertie——will you?"

In his boyish incoherence and its disjointed inelegance the appeal was panted out rather than spoken, and while his head drooped and the hot color burned in his face, he darted a swift look at his brother, so full of dread and misery that it pierced Cecil to the quick as he rose from his chair and paced the room, flinging his cheroot aside; the look disarmed the reply that was on his lips, but his face grew dark.

"What you ask is impossible," he said briefly. "If I did such a thing as that, I should deserve to be hounded out of the Guards to-morrow."

The boy's face grew more sullen, more haggard, more evil, as he still bent his arms on the table, his glance not meeting his brother's.

"You speak as if it would be a crime," he muttered savagely, with a plaintive moan of pain in the tone; he thought himself cruelly dealt with, and unjustly punished.

"It would be the trick of a swindler, and it would be the shame of a gentleman," said Cecil as briefly still. "That is answer enough."

"Then you will not do it?"

"I have replied already."

There was that in the tone, and in the look with which he paused before the table, that Berkeley had never heard or seen in him before; something that made the supple, childish, petulant, cowardly nature of the boy shrink and be silenced; something for a single instant of the haughty and untameable temper of the Royallieu blood that awoke in the too feminine softness and sweetness of Cecil's disposition.

"You said that you would aid me at any cost, and now

that I ask you so wretched a trifle, you treat me as if I were a scoundrel," he moaned passionately. "The Seraph would give you the money at a word. It is your pride—nothing but pride. Much pride is worth to us who are penniless beggars!"

"If we are penniless beggars, by what right should we borrow of other men?"

"You are wonderfully scrupulous all of a sudden!"

Cecil shrugged his shoulders slightly and began to smoke again. He did not attempt to push the argument. His character was too indolent to defend itself against aspersion, and horror of a quarrelsome scene far greater than his heed of misconstruction.

"You are a brute to me!" went on the lad, with his querulous and bitter passion rising almost to tears like a woman's. "You pretend you can refuse me nothing; and the moment I ask you the smallest thing, you turn round on me, and speak as if I were the greatest blackguard on earth. You'll let me go to the bad to-morrow rather than bend your pride to save me; you live like a Duke, and don't care if I should die in a debtors' prison! You only brag about 'honor' when you want to get out of helping a fellow, and if I were to cut my throat to-night you would only shrug your shoulders, and sneer at my death in the club-room, with a jest picked out of your cursed French novels!"

"Melodramatic, and scarcely correct," murmured Bertie.

The ingratitude to himself touched him indeed but little; he was not given to making much of anything that was due to himself, partly through carelessness, partly through generosity; but the absence in his brother of that delicate, intangible, indescribable, sensitive-nerve which men call Honor, an absence that had never struck on

him so vividly as it did to-night, troubled him, surprised him, oppressed him.

There is no science that can supply this defect to the temperament created without it; it may be taught a counterfeit, but it will never own a reality.

"Little one, you are heated, and don't know what you say," he began very gently a few moments later, as he leaned forward and looked straight in the boy's eyes; "don't be down about this; you will pull through, never fear. Listen to me; go down to Royal, and tell him all frankly. I know him better than you; he will be savage for a second, but he would sell every stick and stone on the land for your sake; he will see you safe through this. Only bear one thing in mind—tell him *all*. No half measures, no half confidences; tell him the worst, and ask his help. You will not come back without it."

Berkeley listened, his eyes shunning his brother's, the red color darker on his face.

"Do as I say," said Cecil very gently still. "Tell him, if you like, that it is through following my follies that you have come to grief; he will be sure to pity you then."

There was a smile, a little sad, on his lips, as he said the last words, but it passed at once, as he added:

"Do you hear me, will you go?"

"If you want me—yes."

"On your word, now."

"On my word."

There was an impatience in the answer, a feverish eagerness in the way he assented, that might have made the consent rather a means to evade the pressure than a genuine pledge to follow the advice; that darker, more evil, more defiant look, was still upon his face, sweeping its youth away and leaving in its stead a wavering shadow. He rose with a sudden movement; his tumbled hair, his

disordered attire, his bloodshot eyes, his haggard look of sleeplessness and excitement in strange contrast with the easy perfection of Cecil's dress and the calm languor of his attitude. The boy was very young, and was not seasoned to his life and acclimatised to his ruin like his elder brother. He looked at him with a certain petulant envy; the envy of every young fellow for a man of the world. "I beg your pardon for keeping you up, Bertie," he said huskily. "Good night."

Cecil gave a little yawn.

"Dear boy, it *would* have been better if you could have come in with the coffee. Never be impulsive; don't do a bit of good, and *is* such a bad form!"

He spoke lightly, serenely, both because such was as much his nature as it was to breathe, and because his heart was heavy that he had to send away the young one without help, though he knew that the course he had made him adopt would serve him more permanently in the end. But he leant his hand a second on Berke's shoulder, while for one single moment in his life he grew serious.

"You must know I could not do what you asked; I could not meet any man in the Guards face to face if I sunk myself and sunk them so low. Can't you see that, little one?"

There was a wishfulness in the last words; he would gladly have believed that his brother had at length some perception of his meaning.

"You say so, and that is enough," said the boy, pettishly; "I cannot understand that I asked anything so dreadful; but I suppose you have too many needs of your own to have any resources left for mine."

Cecil shrugged his shoulders slightly again, and let him go. But he could not altogether banish a pang of

pain at his heart, less even for his brother's ingratitude than at his callousness to all those finer, better instincts of which honor is the concrete name. For the moment, thought, grave, weary, and darkened, fell on him; he had passed through what he would have suffered any amount of misconstruction to escape—a disagreeable scene; he had been as unable as though he were a Commissionaire in the streets to advance a step to succor the necessities for which his help had been asked; and he was forced, despite all his will, to look for the first time blankly in the face the ruin that awaited him. There was no other name for it: it would be ruin complete and wholly inevitable. His signature would have been accepted no more by any bill-discounter in London; he had forestalled all, to the uttermost farthing; his debts pressed heavier every day; he could have no power to avert the crash that must in a few weeks, or at most a few months, fall upon him. And to him an utter blankness and darkness lay beyond.

Barred out from the only life he knew, the only life that seemed to him endurable or worth the living; severed from all the pleasures, pursuits, habits, and luxuries of long custom; deprived of all that had become to him as second nature from childhood; sold up, penniless, driven out from all that he had known as the very necessities of existence, his very name forgotten in the world of which he was now the darling, a man without a career, without a hope, without a refuge—he could not realize that this was what awaited him then; this was the fate that must within so short a space be his. Life had gone so smoothly with him, and his world was a world from whose surface every distasteful thought was so habitually excluded, that he could no more understand this desolation lying in wait for him, than one in the fullness and

elasticity of health can believe the doom that tells him he will be a dead man before the sun has set.

As he sat there, with the gas of the mirror branches glancing on the gold and silver hilts of the cross swords above the fireplace, and the smoke of his cheroot curling among the pile of invitation cards to all the best houses in the town, Cecil could not bring himself to believe that things were really come to this pass with him; it is so hard for a man who has the magnificence of the fashionable clubs open to him day and night to beat into his brain the truth that in six months hence he may be lying in the debtors' prison at Baden; it is so difficult for a man who has had no greater care on his mind than to plan the courtesies of a Guards' Ball or of a yacht's summer-day banquet, to absolutely conceive the fact that in a year's time he will thank God if he have a few francs left to pay for a wretched dinner in a miserable estaminet in a foreign bathing-place.

"It mayn't come to that," he thought; "something may happen. If I could get my troop now, that would stave off the Jews, or if I should win some heavy pots on the Prix de Dames, things would swim on again. I *must* win; the King will be as fit as in the Shires, and there will only be the French horses between us and an absolute 'walk over.' Things mayn't come to the worst after all."

And so careless and quickly oblivious, happily or unhappily, was his temperament, that he read himself to sleep with Terrail's "*Club des Valets de Cœur*," and slept in ten minutes' time as composedly as though he had inherited fifty thousand a year.

That evening in the loose-box down at Royallieu, Forest King stood without any body-clothing, for the night was close and sultry; a lock of the sweetest hay

unnoticed in his rack, and his favorite wheaten-gruel standing uncared-for under his very nose: the King was in the height of excitation, alarm, and haughty wrath. His ears were laid flat to his head, his nostrils were distended, his eyes were glancing uneasily with a nervous angry fire rarely in him, and ever and anon he lashed out his heels with a tremendous thundering thud against the opposite wall with a force that reverberated through the stables, and made his companions start and edge away. It was precisely these companions that the aristocratic hero of the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon scornfully abhorred.

They had just been looking him over—to their own imminent peril; and the patrician winner of the Vase, the brilliant six-year old of Paris, and Shire and Spa steeple-chase fame, the knightly descendant of the White Cockade blood, and of the coursers of Circassia, had resented the familiarity proportionately to his own renown and dignity. The King was a very sweet-tempered horse, a perfect temper, indeed, and ductile to a touch from those he loved; but he liked very few, and would suffer liberties from none. And of a truth his prejudices were very just; and if his clever heels had caught—as it was not his fault that they did not—the heads of his two companions, instead of coming with that ponderous crash into the panels of his box, society would certainly have been no loser, and his owner would have gained more than had ever before hung in the careless balance of his life.

But the iron heels, with their shining plates, only caught the oak of his box-door; and the tête-à-tête in the sultry oppressive night went on as the speakers moved to a prudent distance, one of them thoughtfully chewing a bit of straw, after the immemorial habit of grooms, who ever seem as if they had been born into this world with a cornstalk ready in their mouths.

"It's a'most a pity—he's in such perfect condition. Tiptop. Cool as a cucumber after the longest pipe-opener; licks his oats up to the last grain; leads the whole string such a rattling spin as never *was* spun but by a Derby cracker before him. It's a'most a pity," said Willon meditatively, eyeing his charge, the King, with remorseful glances.

"Prut—tush—tish!" said his companion, with a whistle in his teeth that ended with a "damnation!" "It'll only knock him over for the race; he'll be right as a trivet after it. What's your little game, coming it soft like that all of a sudden? You hate that ere young swell like pison."

"Ay," assented the head groom with a tigerish energy, viciously consuming his bit of straw. "What for am I—head groom come nigh twenty years; and to Markisses and Wiscounts afore him—put aside in that ere way for a fellow as he's took into his service out of the dregs of a regiment, what was tied up at the triangles and branded D, as I know on, and sore suspected of even worse games than that, and now is that set up with pride and sich-like, that nobody's woice ain't heard here except his; I say what am I, called on to bear it for?" and the head groom's tones grew hoarse and vehement, roaring louder under his injuries. "A man what's attended on Duke's 'osses ever since he was a shaver, to be put aside for that workhus blackguard! A 'oss has a cold—it's Rake's mash what's to be given. A 'oss is off his feed—it's Rake what's to weigh out the niter and steel. A 'oss is a buck-jumper—it's Rake what's to cure him. A 'oss is entered for a race—it's Rake what's to order his mornin' gallops, and his go-downs o' water. It's past bearin' to have a rascally chap what's been and gone and turned walet, set up over one's head in one's own establishment, and let to ride the high 'oss over one roughshod like that!".

And Mr. Willon, in his disgust at the equestrian contumely thus heaped on him, bit the straw savagely in two, and made an end of it, with a vindictive "*Will* yer be quiet there: blow yer," to the King, who was protesting with his heels against the conversation.

"Come, then, no gammon," growled his companion —the "cousin out o' Yorkshire" of the keeper's tree.

"What's yer figure you say?" relented Willon, meditatively.

"Two thousand to nothin'—come!—can't no handsomer," retorted the Yorkshire cousin, with the air of a man conscious of behaving very nobly.

"For the race in Germany?" pursued Mr. Willon, still meditatively.

"Two thousand to nothin'—come!" reiterated the other, with his arms folded to intimate that this and nothing else was the figure to which he would bind himself.

Willon chewed another bit of straw, glanced at the horse as though he were a human thing to hear, to witness, and to judge; grew a little pale; and stooped forward.

"Hush! Somebody'll spy on us. It's a bargain."

"Done. And you'll paint him, eh?"

"Yes—I'll—paint him."

The assent was very husky, and dragged slowly out, while his eyes glanced with a furtive, frightened glance over the loose-box. Then—still with that cringing, terrified look backward to the horse as an assassin may steal a glance before his deed at his unconscious victim —the head groom and his comrade went out and closed the door of the loose-box and passed into the hot lowering summer night.

Forest King, left in solitude, shook himself with a neigh; took a refreshing roll in the straw, and turned with an appetite to his neglected gruel. Unhappily for him-

self, his fine instincts could not teach him the conspiracy that lay in wait for him and his; and the gallant beast, content to be alone, soon slept the sleep of the righteous.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Stag Hunt au Clair de la Lune.

"SERAPH—I've been thinking"—said Cecil, musingly, as they paced homeward together from the Scrubs, with the long line of the First Life stretching before and behind their chargers, and the bands of the Household Cavalry playing mellowly in their rear.

"You don't mean it. Never let it ooze out, Beauty; you'll ruin your reputation!"

Cecil laughed a little, very languidly; to have been in the sun for four hours, in full harness, had almost taken out of him any power to be amused at anything.

"I've been thinking," he went on undisturbed, pulling down his chin-scale. "What's a fellow to do when he's smashed?"

"Eh?" The Seraph couldn't offer a suggestion; he had a vague idea that men who were smashed never *did* do anything except accept the smashing; unless, indeed, they turned up afterwards as touts, of which he had an equally vague suspicion.

"What *do* they do?" pursued Bertie.

"Go to the bad," finally suggested the Seraph, lighting a great cigar, without heeding the presence of the Duke, a Field-Marshal, and a Serene Highness far on in front.

Cecil shook his head.

"Can't go where they are already. I've been thinking what a fellow might do that was up a tree; and on my honor there are lots of things one might turn to——"

"Well, I suppose there are," assented the Seraph,

with a shake of his superb limbs in his saddle, till his cuirass and chains and scabbard rang again. "*I* should try the P. R., only they will have you train."

"One might do better than the P. R. Getting yourself into prime condition, only to be pounded *out* of condition and into a jelly, seems hardly logical or satisfactory—specially to your looking-glass, though, of course, it's a matter of taste. But now, if I had a cropper, and got sold up——"

"You, Beauty?" The Seraph puffed a giant puff of amazement from his Havanna, opening his blue eyes to their widest.

"Possible!" returned Bertie, serenely, with a nonchalant twist to his moustaches. "Anything's possible. If I do now, it strikes me there are vast fields open."

"Gold fields?" suggested the Seraph, wholly bewildered——

"Gold fields? No! I mean a field for—what d'ye call it—genius. Now, look here; nine-tenths of creatures in this world don't know how to put on a glove. It's an art, and an art that requires long study. If a few of us were to turn glove-fitters when we are fairly crashed, we might civilize the whole world, and prevent the deformity of an ill-fitting glove ever blotting creation and prostituting Houbigant. What do you say?"

"Don't be such a donkey, Beauty," laughed the Seraph, while his charger threatened to passage into an oyster-cart.

"You don't appreciate the majesty of great plans," rejoined Beauty, reprovingly. "There's an immense deal in what I'm saying. Think what we might do for society, —think how we might extinguish snobbery, if we just dedicated our smash to Mankind. We might open a College, where the traders might go through a course of

polite training before they blossomed out as millionaires; the world would be spared an agony of dropped h's and bad bows. We might have a Bureau where we registered all our social experiences, and gave the Plutocracy a map of Belgravia, with all the pitfalls marked, all the inaccessible heights colored red, and all the hard-up great people dotted with gold to show the amount they'd be bought for, with directions to the ignoramuses whom to know, court, and avoid. We might form a Courier Company, and take Brummagen abroad under our guidance, so that the Continent shouldn't think Englishwomen always wear blue veils and gray shawls, and hear every Englishman shout for porter and beefsteak in Tortoni's. We might teach them to take their hats off to women, and not to prod pictures with sticks, and to look at statues without poking them with an umbrella, and to be persuaded that all foreigners don't want to be bawled at, and won't understand bad French any the better for its being shouted. Or we might have a Joint Stock Toilet Association, for the purposes of national art, and receive Brummagen to show it how to dress; we might even succeed in making the feminine British Public drape itself properly, and the B. P. masculine wear boots that won't creak, and coats that don't wrinkle, and take off its hat without a jerk, as though it were a wooden puppet hung on very stiff strings. Or one might——"

"Talk the greatest nonsense under the sun!" laughed the Seraph. "For mercy's sake, are you mad, Bertie?"

"Inevitable question addressed to Genius!" yawned Cecil. "I'm showing you plans that might teach a whole nation good style if we just threw ourselves into it a little. I don't mean *you*, because you'll never smash, and one don't turn bear-leader, even to the B. P., without the primary impulse of being hard-up. And I don't talk for

myself, because, when I go to the dogs, I have my own project."

"And what's that?"

"To be groom of the chambers at Meurice's or Claridge's," responded Bertie, solemnly. "Those sublime creatures with their silver chains round their necks and their ineffable supremacy over every other mortal!—one would feel in a superior region still. And when a snob came to poison the air, how exquisitely one could annihilate him with showing him his ignorance of claret; and when an epicure dined, how delightfully, as one carried in a turbot, one could test him with the *éprouvette positive*, or crush him by the *éprouvette négative*. We have been Equerries at the Palace, both of us, but I don't think we know what true dignity is till we shall have risen to head-waiters at a Grand Hotel."

With which Bertie let his charger pace onward, while he reflected thoughtfully on his future state. The Seraph laughed till he almost swayed out of saddle, but he shook himself into his balance again with another clash of his brilliant harness, while his eyes lightened and glanced with a fiery gleam down the line of the Household Cavalry.

"Well, if I went to the dogs, I wouldn't go to Grand Hotels, but I'll tell you where I would go, Beauty."

"Where's that?"

"Into hot service somewhere. By Jove, I'd see some good fighting under another flag—out in Algeria, there, or with the Poles, or after Garibaldi. I would, in a day—I'm not sure I won't now, and I bet you ten to one the life would be better than this."

Which was ungrateful in the Seraph, for his happy temper made him the sunniest and most contented of men, with no cross in his life save the dread that some-

body would manage to marry him some day. But Rock had the true dash and true steel of the soldier in him, and his blue eyes flashed over his Guards as he spoke, with a longing wish that he were leading them on to a charge instead of pacing with them toward Hyde Park.

Cecil turned in his saddle and looked at him with a certain wonder and pleasure in his glance, and did not answer aloud. "The deuce—that's not a bad idea," he thought to himself; and the idea took root and grew with him.

Far down, very far down, so far that nobody had ever seen it, nor himself ever expected it, there was a lurking instinct in "Beauty,"—the instinct that had prompted him, when he sent the King at the Grand Military cracker, with that prayer, "Kill me if you like, but don't *fail* me!"—which, out of the languor and pleasure-loving temper of his unruffled life, had a vague restless impulse toward the fiery perils and nervous excitement of a sterner and more stirring career.

It was only vague, for he was naturally very indolent, very gentle, very addicted to taking all things passively, and very strongly of persuasion that to rouse yourself for anything was a *niaiserie* of the strongest possible folly; but it was there. It always is there with men of Bertie's order, and only comes to light when the match of danger is applied to the touchhole. Then, though "the Tenth don't dance," perhaps, with graceful indolent dandy insolence, they can fight as no others fight when Boot and Saddle rings through the morning air, and the slashing charge sweeps down with lightning speed and falcon swoop.

"In the case of a Countess, sir, the imagination is more excited," says Dr. Johnson, who had, I suppose, little opportunity of putting that doctrine for amatory in-

trigues to the test in actual practice. Bertie, who had many opportunities, differed with him. He found love-making in his own polished tranquil circles apt to become a little dull, and was more amused by Laura Lelas. However, he was sworn to the service of the Guenevere, and he drove his mail-phaeton down that day to another sort of Richmond dinner, of which the lady was the object instead of the Zu-Zu.

She enjoyed thinking herself the wife of a jealous and inexorable lord, and arranged her flirtations to evade him with a degree of skill so great, that it was lamentable it should be thrown away on an agricultural husband, who never dreamt that the "Fidelio—III—TstnegeR," which met his eyes in the innocent face of his *Times* referred to an appointment at a Regent Street modiste's, or that the advertisement—"White wins—Twelve," meant that if she wore white camellias in her hair at the opera, she would give "Beauty" a meeting after it.

Lady Guenevere was very scrupulous never to violate conventionalities. And yet she was a little fast—very fast, indeed, and was a queen of one of the fastest sets; but then—O, sacred shield of a wife's virtue—she could not have borne to lose her very admirable position, her very magnificent jointure, and, above all, the superb Guenevere diamonds!

I don't know anything that will secure a husband from an infidelity so well as very fine family jewels, when such an infidelity would deprive his wife of them for ever. Many women will leave their homes, their lords, their children, and their good name, if the fancy take them; but there is not one in a million who will so far forget herself as to sever from pure rose-diamonds.

So, for sake of the diamonds, she and Bertie had their rendezvous under the rose.

This day she went down to see a dowager Baroness aunt, out at Hampton Court—really went: she was never so imprudent as to falsify her word, and with the Dowager, who was very deaf and purblind, dined at Richmond, while the world thought her dining at Hampton Court. It was nothing to any one, since none knew it to gossip about, that Cecil joined her there: that over the Star and Garter repast they arranged their meeting at Baden next month: that while the Baroness dozed over the grapes and peaches—she had been a beauty herself, in her own day, and still had her sympathies—they went on the river, in the little toy that he kept there for his fair friends' use, floating slowly along in the coolness of evening, while the stars loomed out in the golden trail of the sunset, and doing a graceful scene *à la* Musset and Meredith, with a certain languid amusement in the assumption of those poetic guises, for they were of the world worldly; and neither believed very much in the other.

When you have just dined well, and there has been no fault in the clarets, and the scene is pretty, if it be not the Nile in the after-glow, the Arno in the moonlight, or the Loire in vintage-time, but only the Thames above Richmond, it is the easiest thing in the world to feel a touch of sentiment when you have a beautiful woman beside you who expects you to feel it. The evening was very hot and soft. There was a low south wind, the water made a pleasant murmur, wending among its sedges. She was very lovely, moreover, lying back there among her laces and Indian shawls, with the sunset in the brown depths of her eyes and on her delicate cheek. And Bertie, as he looked on his liege lady, really had a glow of the old, real, foolish, forgotten feeling stir at his heart, as he gazed on her in the half-light, and thought, almost

wistfully, "If the Jews were down on me to-morrow, would she really care, I wonder?"

Really care? Bertie knew his world and its women too well to deceive himself in his heart about the answer. Nevertheless, he asked the question. "Would you care much, *chère belle?*"

"Care what?"

"If I came to grief,—went to the bad, you know; dropped out of the world altogether."

She raised her splendid eyes in amaze, with a delicate shudder through all her laces. "Bertie! you would break my heart! What can you dream of?"

"Oh, lots of us end so. How *is* a man to end?" answered Bertie, philosophically, while his thoughts still ran off in a speculative scepticism. "Is there a heart to break?"

Her ladyship looked at him, and laughed.

"A Werter in the Guards! I don't think the *rôle* will suit either you or your corps, Bertie; but if you do it, pray do it artistically. I remember, last year, driving through Asnières, when they had found a young man in the Seine; he was very handsome, beautifully dressed, and he held fast in his clenched hand a gold lock of hair. Now, there was a man who knew how to die gracefully, and make his death an idyl!"

"Died for a woman?—ah!" murmured Bertie, with the Brummel nonchalance of his order. "I don't think I should do that, even for *you*,—not, at least, while I had a cigar left."

And then the boat drifted backward, while the stars grew brighter and the last reflection of the sun died out; and they planned to meet to-morrow, and talked of Baden, and sketched projects for the winter in Paris, and went in and sat by the window, taking their coffee, and

feeling, in a half vague pleasure, the heliotrope-scented air blowing softly in from the garden below, and the quiet of the star-lit river in the summer evening, with a white sail gleaming here and there, or the gentle splash of an oar following on the swift trail of a steamer: the quiet, so still and so strange after the crowded rush of the London season.

"Would she really care?" thought Cecil, once more. In that moment he could have wished to think she would.

But heliotrope, stars, and a river, even though it had been tawny and classical Tiber instead of ill-used and inodorous Thames, were not things sufficiently in the way of either of them to detain them long. They had both seen the Babylonian sun set over the ruins of the Birs Nimrud, and had talked of Paris fashions while they did so; they had both leaned over the terraces of Bellosguardo, while the moon was full on Giotto's tower, and had discussed their dresses for the Veglione masquerade. It was not their style to care for these matters; they were pretty, to be sure, but they had seen so many of them.

The Dowager went home in her brougham; the Countess drove in his mail-phaeton, objectionable, as she might be seen, but less objectionable than letting her servants know he had met her at Richmond. Besides, she obviated danger by bidding him set her down at a little villa across the park, where dwelt a confidential protégée of hers, whom she patronized; a former French governess, married tolerably well, who had the Countess's confidences, and kept them religiously for sake of so aristocratic a patron, and of innumerable reversions of Spanish point and shawls that had never been worn, and rings, of which her lavish ladyship had got tired.

From here, she would take her ex-governess's little

broughani, and get quietly back to her own house in Eaton Square in due time for all the drums and crushes at which she must make her appearance. This was the sort of little devices which really made them think themselves in love, and gave the salt to the whole affair. Moreover, there was this ground for it, that had her lord once roused from the straw-yards of his prize cattle, there was a certain stubborn, irrational, old-world prejudice of pride and temper in him that would have made him throw expediency to the winds, then and there, with a blind and brutal disregard to slander and to the fact that none would ever adorn his diamonds as she did. So that Cecil had not only her fair fame, but her still more valuable jewels in his keeping when he started from the Star and Garter in the warmth of the bright summer's evening.

It was a lovely night; a night for lonely highland tarns, and southern shores by Baiæ; without a cloud to veil the brightness of the stars; a heavy dew pressed the odors from the grasses, and the deep glades of the avenues were pierced here and there with a broad beam of silvery moonlight, slanting through the massive boles of the trees, and falling white and serene across the turf. Through the park, with the gleam of the water ever and again shining through the branches of the foliage, Cecil started his horses; his groom he had sent away on reaching Richmond, for the same reason as the Countess had dismissed her barouche, and he wanted no servant, since, as soon as he had set down his liege lady at her protégée's, he would drive straight back to Piccadilly. But he had not noticed what he noted now, that instead of one of his carriage-grays, who had fallen slightly lame, they had put into harness the young one, Maraschino, who matched admirably for size and color,

but who, being really a hunter, though he had been broken to shafts as well, was not the horse with which to risk driving a lady.

However, Beauty was a perfect whip, and had the pair perfectly in hand, so that he thought no more of the change, as the grays dashed at a liberal half-speed through the park, with their harness flashing in the moonlight, and their scarlet rosettes fluttering in the pleasant air. The eyes beside him, the Titian-like mouth, the rich, delicate cheek, these were, to be sure, rather against the coolness and science that such a five-year old as Maraschino required; they were distracting even to Cecil, and he had not prudence enough to deny his sovereign lady when she put her hands on the ribbons.

"The beauties! give them to me, Bertie. Dangerous? How absurd you are; as if I could not drive *anything!* Do you remember my four roans at Longchamps?"

She could, indeed, with justice, pique herself on her skill; she drove matchlessly, but as he resigned them to her, Maraschino and his companion quickened their trot, and tossed their pretty thoroughbred heads, conscious of a less powerful hand on the reins.

"I shall let their pace out, there is nobody to run over here," said her ladyship. "*Va-t-en donc, mon beau monsieur.*"

Maraschino, as though hearing the flattering conjuration, swung off into a light, quick canter, and tossed his head again; he knew that, good whip though she was, he could jerk his mouth free in a second if he wanted. Cecil laughed, prudence was at no time his virtue, and leant back contentedly, to be driven at a slashing pace through the balmy summer's night, while the ring of the hoofs rang merrily on the turf, and the boughs were tossed aside with a dewy fragrance. As they went, the

moonlight was shed about their path in the full of the young night, and at the end of a vista of boughs, on a grassy knoll were some phantom forms, the same graceful shapes that stand out against the purple heather and the tawny gorse of Scottish moorlands, while the lean rifle-tube creeps up by stealth. In the clear starlight there stood the deer, a dozen of them, a clan of stags alone, with their antlers clashing like the clash of swords, and waving like swaying banners as they tossed their heads and listened.*

In an instant the hunter pricked his ears, snuffed the air and twitched with passionate impatience at his bit; —another instant and he got his head, and launching into a sweeping gallop rushed down the glade.

Cecil sprang forward from his lazy rest, and seized the ribbons that in one instant had cut his companion's gloves to stripes.

"Sit still," he said calmly, but under his breath. "He has been always ridden with the Buck-hounds; he will race the deer as sure as we live!"

Race the deer he did.

Startled, and fresh for their favorite nightly wandering, the stags were off like the wind at the noise of alarm, and the horses tore after them; no skill, no strength, no science, could avail to pull them in, they had taken their bits between their teeth, and the devil that was in Maraschino lent the contagion of sympathy to the young carriage mare, who had never gone at such a pace since she had been first put in her break.

* Let me here take leave to beg pardon of the gallant Highland stags for comparing them one instant with the shabby, miserable-looking wretches that travesty them in Richmond Park. After seeing these latter scrubby, meagre apologies for deer, one wonders why something better cannot be turned loose there. A hunting-mare I know well, nevertheless flattered them thus by racing them through the park; when in harness herself to her own great disgust.

Neither Cecil's hands nor any other force could stop them now; on they went, hunting as straight in line as though staghounds streamed in front of them, and no phaeton rocked and swayed in a dead and dragging weight behind them. In a moment he gauged the closeness and the vastness of the peril; there was nothing for it but to trust to chance, to keep his grasp on the reins to the last, and to watch for the first sign of exhaustion. Long ere that should be given death might have come to them both; but there was a gay excitation in that headlong rush through the summer night, there was a champagne-draught of mirth and mischief in that dash through the starlit woodland, there was a reckless, breathless pleasure in that neck-or-nothing moonlight chase!

Yet danger was so near with every oscillation; the deer were trooping in fast flight, now clear in the moonlight, now lost in the shadow, bounding with their lightning grace over sward and hillock, over briar and brushwood, at that speed which kills most living things that dare to race the "Monarch of the Glens." And the grays were in full pursuit; the hunting fire was in the fresh young horse; he saw the shadowy branches of the antlers toss before him, and he knew no better than to hunt down in their scenting line as hotly as though the field of the Queen's or the Baron's was after them. What cared he for the phaeton that rocked and reeled on his traces, he felt its weight no more than if it were a wicker-work toy, and extended like a greyhound he swerved from the road, swept through the trees, and tore down across the grassland in the track of the herd.

Through the great boles of the trunks, bronze and black in the shadows, across the hilly rises of the turf, through the brushwood pell-mell, and crash across the

level stretches of the sward, they raced as though the hounds were streaming in front; swerved here, tossed there, carried in a whirlwind over the mounds, wheeled through the gloom of the woven branches, splashed with a hiss through the shallow rain-pools, shot swift as an arrow across the silver radiance of the broad moonlight, borne against the sweet south wind, and down the odors of the trampled grass, the carriage was hurled across the park in the wild starlight chase. It rocked, it swayed, it shook, at every yard, while it was carried on like a paper toy; as yet the marvellous chances of accident had borne it clear of the destruction that threatened it at every step as the grays, in the height of their pace now, and powerless even to have arrested themselves, flew through the woodland, neither knowing what they did, nor heeding where they went; but racing down on the scent, not feeling the strain of the traces, and only maddened the more by the noise of the whirling wheels behind them.

As Cecil leaned back, his hands clinched on the reins, his sinews stretched almost to bursting in their vain struggle to recover power over the loosened beasts, the hunting zest woke in him too, even while his eyes glanced on his companion in fear and anxiety for her.

"Tally-ho! hark forward! As I live it is glorious!" he cried, half unconsciously. "For God's sake sit still, Beatrice! I will save you."

Inconsistent as the words were, they were true to what he felt: alone, he would have flung himself delightedly into the madness of the chase, for her he dreaded with horror the imminence of their peril.

On fled the deer, on swept the horses; faster in the gleam of the moonlight the antlered troop darted on through the gloaming; faster tore the grays in the ecstasy of their freedom; headlong and heedless they dashed

through the thickness of leaves and the weaving of branches; neck to neck straining to distance each other, and held together by the gall of the harness. The broken boughs snapped, the earth flew up beneath their hoofs, their feet struck scarlet sparks of fire from the stones, the carriage was whirled, rocking and tottering, through the maze of tree-trunks, towering like pillars of black stone up against the steel-blue clearness of the sky. The strain was intense; the danger deadly: suddenly, straight ahead, beyond the darkness of the foliage, gleamed a line of light; shimmering, liquid, and glassy, here brown as gloom where the shadows fell on it, here light as life where the stars mirrored on it. That trembling line stretched right in their path. For the first time from the blanched lips beside him a cry of terror rang.

"The river!—oh, heaven!—the river!"

There it lay in the distance, the deep and yellow water, cold in the moon's rays, with its farther bank but a dull gray line in the mists that rose from it, and its swamp a yawning grave, as the horses, blind in their delirium, and racing against each other, bore down through all obstacles toward its brink. Death was rarely ever closer; one score yards more, one plunge, one crash down the declivity and against the rails, one swell of the noisome tide above their heads, and life would be closed and passed for both of them. For one breathless moment his eyes met hers, —in that moment he loved her, in that moment their hearts beat with a truer, fonder impulse to each other than they had ever done. Before the presence of a threatening death life grows real, love grows precious, to the coldest and most careless.

No aid could come; not a living soul was nigh; the solitude was as complete as though a western prairie stretched around them; there were only the still and

shadowy night, the chilly silence, on which the beat of the plunging hoofs shattered like thunder, and the glisten of the flowing water growing nearer and nearer every yard. The tranquillity around only jarred more horribly on ear and brain; the vanishing forms of the antlered deer only gave a weirder grace to the moonlight-chase whose goal was the grave. It was like the midnight hunt after Herne the Hunter; but here, behind them, hunted Death.

The animals neither saw nor knew what waited them, as they rushed down on to the broad, gray stream, veiled from them by the slope and the screen of flickering leaves; to save them there was but one chance, and that so desperate that it looked like madness. It was but a second's thought; he gave it but a second's resolve.

The next instant he stood on his feet, as the carriage swayed to and fro over the turf, balanced himself marvellously as it staggered in that furious gallop from side to side, clinched the reins hard in the grip of his teeth, measured the distance with an unerring eye, and crouching his body for the spring with all the science of the old playing-fields of his Eton days, cleared the dashboard and lighted astride on the back of the hunting five-year old;—how, he could never have remembered, or have told.

The tremendous pace at which they went swayed him with a lurch and a reel over the off-side; a woman's cry rang again, clear, and shrill, and agonized on the night; a moment more, and he would have fallen head downward beneath the horses' feet. But he had ridden stirrupless and saddle-less ere now; he recovered himself with the suppleness of an Arab, and firm-seated behind the collar, with one leg crushed between the pole and Maraschino's flanks, gathering in the ribbons till they were

tight-drawn as a bridle, he strained with all the might and sinew that were in him to get the grays in hand before they could plunge down into the water. His wrists were wrenched like pulleys, the resistance against him was hard as iron, but as he had risked life and limb in the leap which had seated him across the harnessed loins of the now terrified beast, so he risked them afresh to get the mastery now; to slacken them, turn them ever so slightly, and save the woman he loved—loved, at least in this hour, as he had not loved her before. One moment more, while the half-maddened beasts rushed through the shadows; one moment more, till the river stretched full before them in all its length and breadth, without a living thing upon its surface to break the still and awful calm; one moment—and the force of cool command conquered and broke their wills despite themselves. The hunter knew his master's voice, his touch, his pressure, and slackened speed by an irresistible, almost unconscious habit of obedience; the carriage mare, checked and galled in the full height of her speed, stood erect, pawing the air with her forelegs, and flinging the white froth over her withers, while she plunged blindly in her nervous terror, then with a crash, her feet came down upon the ground, the broken harness shivered together with a sharp, metallic clash; snorting, panting, quivering, trembling, the pair stood passive and vanquished.

The carriage was overthrown; but the high and fearless courage of the peeress bore her unharmed, even as she was flung out on to the yielding fern-grown turf; fair as she was in every hour, she had never looked fairer than as he swung himself from the now powerless horses and threw himself beside her.

"My love—my love, you are saved!"

The beautiful eyes looked up half unconscious; the

danger told on her now that it was passed, as it does most commonly with women.

"Saved!—lost! All the world must know, now, that you are with me this evening," she murmured with a shudder; she lived for the world, and her first thought was of self.

He soothed her tenderly.

"Hush—be at rest. There is no injury but what I can repair, nor is there a creature in sight to have witnessed the accident. Trust in me; no one shall ever know of this. You shall reach town safely and alone."

And while he promised, he forgot that he thus pledged his honor to leave four hours of his life so buried that, however much he needed, he neither should nor could account for them.

CHAPTER IX.

The painted Bit.

BADEN was at its brightest. The Victoria, the Badischer Hof, the Stephanie Bauer were crowded. The Kurliste had a dazzling string of names. Imperial grandeur sauntered in slippers, chiefs used to be saluted with "Ave Cæsar Imperator," smoked a papelito in peace over *Galignani*. Emperors gave a good-day to ministers who made their thrones beds of thorns, and little kings elbowed great capitalists who could have bought them all up in a morning's work in the money market. Statecraft was in its slippers, and diplomacy in its dressing-gown. Statesmen who had just been outwitting each other at the hazard of European politics, laughed good-humoredly as they laid their gold down on the color. Rivals who had lately been quarrelling over the knotty points of national frontiers now only vied for a twenty-franc rosebud

from the bouquetière. Knights of the Garter and Knights of the Golden Fleece, who had hated each other to deadliest rancor with the length of the Continent between them, got friends over a mutually good book on the Rastadt or Forêt Noir. Brains that were the powder depôt of one half of the universe let themselves be lulled with the monotone of "*Faites votre jeu!*" or fanned to tranquil amusement by a fair idiot's coquetry. And lips that, with a whisper, could loosen the coursing slips of the wild hell-dogs of war, murmured love to a princess, led the laugh at a supper at five in the morning, or smiled over their own caricatures done by Tenniel or Cham.

Baden was full. The supreme empires of demi-monde sent their sovereigns diamond-crowned and resistless to outshine all other principalities and powers, while in breadth of marvellous skirts, in costliness of cobweb laces, in unapproachability of Indian shawls, and gold embroideries, and mad fantasies and Cleopatra extravagances, and jewels fit for a Maharajah, the Zu-Zu was distanced by none.

Among the kings and heroes and celebrities who gathered under the pleasant shadow of the pine-crowned hills, there was not one in his way greater than the steeple-chaser, Forest King—certes, there was not one half so honest.

The Guards' crack was entered for the Prix de Dames, the sole representative of England. There were two or three good things out of French stables, specially a killing little bay, L'Etoile, and there was an Irish sorrel, the property of an Austrian of rank, of which fair things were whispered; but it was scarcely possible that anything could stand against the King, and that wonderful stride of his

which spread-eagled his field like magic, and his countrymen were well content to leave their honor and their old renown to "Beauty" and his six-year old.

Beauty himself, with a characteristic philosophy, had a sort of conviction that the German race would set everything square. He stood either to make a very good thing on it, or to be very heavily hit. There could be no medium. He never hedged in his life; and as it was almost a practical impossibility that anything the foreign stables could get together would even be able to land within half a dozen lengths of the King, Cecil, always willing to console himself, and invariably too careless to take the chance of adverse accident into account, had come to Baden, and was amusing himself there dropping a Friederich d'Or on the rouge, flirting in the shady alleys of the Lichtenthal, waltzing Lady Guenevere down the ball-room, playing écarté with some Serene Highness, supping with the Zu-Zu and her set, and occupying rooms that a Russian Prince had had before him, with all the serenity of a millionaire, as far as memory of money went. With much more than the serenity in other matters of most millionaires, who, finding themselves uncommonly ill at ease in the pot-pourri of monarchs and ministers, of beau-monde and demi-monde, would have given half their newly-turned thousands to get rid of the odor of Capel Court and the Bourse, and to attain the calm, negligent assurance, the easy, tranquil insolence, the nonchalance with Princes, and the supremacy among the Free Lances, which they saw and coveted in the indolent Guardsman.

Bertie amused himself. He might be within a day of his ruin, but that was no reason why he should not sip his iced sherbet and laugh with a pretty French actress to-night. His epicurean formulary was the same as old

Herrick's, and he would have paraphrased this poet's famous quatrain into

> Drink a pure claret while you may,
> Your "stiff" is still a flying;
> And he who dines so well to-day
> To-morrow may be lying,
> Pounced down upon by Jews *tout net*,
> Or outlawed in a French *guinguette!*

Bertie was a great believer—if the words are not too sonorous and too earnest to be applied to his very inconsequent views upon any and everything—in the philosophy of happy accident. Far as it was in him to have a conviction at all, which was a thorough-going serious sort of thing not by any means his "form," he had a conviction that the doctrine of "Eat, drink, and enjoy, for to-morrow we die," was an universal panacea. He was reckless to the uttermost stretch of recklessness, all serene and quiet, though his pococurantism and his daily manner were; and while subdued to the undeviating monotone and languor of his peculiar set in all his temper and habits, the natural dare-devil in him took out its inborn instincts in a wildly careless and gamester-like imprudence with that most touchy-tempered and inconsistent of all coquettes—Fortune.

Things, he thought, could not well be worse with him than they were now. So he piled all on one *coup*, and stood to be sunk or saved by the Prix de Dames. Meanwhile, all the same, he murmured Mussetism to the Guenevere under the ruins of the Alte Schloss, lost or won a rouleau at the roulette-wheel, gave a bank note to the famous Isabel for a tea-rose, drove the Zu-Zu four in hand to see the Flat races, took his guinea tickets for the Concerts, dined with Princes, lounged arm-in-arm with Grand Dukes, gave an Emperor a hint as to the best cigars, and charmed a Monarch by unfolding the

secret of the aroma of a Guards' Punch, sacred to the Household.

"*Si on ne meurt pas de désespoir on finit par manger des huîtres*," said the witty Frenchwoman; Bertie, who believed in bivalves but not in heroics, thought it best to take the oysters first, and eschew the despair entirely.

He had one unchangeable quality—insouciance; and he had, moreover, one unchangeable faith—the King. Lady Guenevere had reached home unnoticed after the accident of their moonlight stag-hunt. His brother meeting him a day or two after their interview, had nodded affirmatively, though sulkily, in answer to his inquiries, and had murmured that it was "all square now." The Jews and the tradesmen had let him leave for Baden without more serious measures than a menace, more or less insolently worded. In the same fashion he trusted that the King's running at the Bad, with the moneys he had on it, would set all things right for a little while, when, if his family interest, which was great, would get him his step in the First Life, he thought, desperate as things were, they might come round again smoothly, without a notorious crash.

"You are sure the King will 'stay,' Bertie?" asked Lady Guenevere, who had some hundreds in gloves (and even under the rose "sported a pony" or so more seriously) on the event.

"Certain! But if he don't, I promise you as pretty a tableau as your Asnières one; for your sake, I'll make the finish as picturesque as possible; wouldn't it be well to give me a lock of hair in readiness?"

Her ladyship laughed, and shook her head; if a man killed himself she did not desire that her gracious name should be entangled with the folly.

"No, I don't do those things," she said, with cap-

tivating waywardness. "Besides, though the Oos looks cool and pleasant, I greatly doubt that under any pressure you would trouble it; suicides are too pronounced for your style, Bertie."

"At all events, a little morphia in one's own rooms would be quieter, and better taste," said Cecil, while he caught himself listlessly wondering, as he had wondered at Richmond, if this badinage were to turn into serious fact—how much would she care.

"May your sins be forgiven you!" cried Chesterfield, the apostle of training, as he and the Seraph came up to the table where Cecil and Cos Wentworth were breakfasting in the garden of the Stephanien on the race-day itself. "Liqueurs, truffles, and every devilment under the sun?—cold beef, and nothing to drink, Beauty, if you've any conscience left!"

"Never had a grain, dear boy, since I can remember," murmured Bertie, apologetically. "*You* took all the rawness off me at Eton."

"And you've been taking coffee in bed, I'll swear?" pursued the cross-examiner.

"What if he have? Beauty's condition can't be upset by a little mocha, nor mine either," said his universal defender; and the Seraph shook his splendid limbs with a very pardonable vanity.

"Ruteroth trains; Ruteroth trains awfully," put in Cos Wentworth, looking up out of a great silver flagon of Badminton, with which he was ending his breakfast; and referring to the Austrian who was to ride the Paris favorite. "Remember him at La Marche last year, and the racing at Vincennes—didn't take a thing that could make flesh —muscles like iron, you know—never touched a soda even——"

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"I've trained too," said Bertie, submissively; "look how I've been waltzing! There isn't harder work than that for any fellow. A deuxtemps with the Duchess takes it out of you like any spin over the flat."

His censurers laughed, but did not give in their point.

"You've run shocking risks, Beauty," said Chesterfield; "the King's in fine running-form, don't say he isn't; but you've said scores of times what a deal of riding he takes. Now, can you tell us yourself that you're in as hard condition as you were when you won the Military, eh?"

Cecil shook his head with a sigh:—

"I don't think I am; I've had things to try me, you see. There was that Verschoyle's proposal. I did absolutely think at one time she'd marry me before I could protest against it! Then there was that shock to one's whole nervous system, when that indigo man, who took Lady Laura's house, asked *us* to dinner, and actually thought we should go!—and there was a scene, you know, of all earthly horrors, when Mrs. Gervase was so near eloping with me, and Gervase cut up rough, instead of pitying me; and then the field-days were so many, and so late into the season; and I exhausted myself so at the Belvoir theatricals at Easter; and I toiled so atrociously playing *Almaviva* at your place, Seraph—a private opera's galley slave's work!—and, altogether, I've had a good many things to pull me down since the winter," concluded Bertie, with a plaintive self-condolence over his truffles.

The rest of his condemning judges laughed, and passed the plea of sympathy; the Coldstreamer alone, remained censorious and untouched.

"Pull you *down!* You'll never pull *off* the race if

you sit drinking liquors all the morning," growled that censor. "Look at that!"

Bertie glanced at the London telegram tossed across to him, sent from a private and confidential agent.

"Betting here—2 to 1 on L'Etoile; Irish Roan offered and taken freely. Slight decline in closing prices for the King; getting on French bay rather heavily at midnight. Fancy there's a commission out against the King. Looks suspicious." Cecil shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows a little.

"All the better for us. Take all they'll lay against me. It's as good as *our* having a 'Commission out;' and if any cads get one against us it can't mean mischief, as it would with professional jocks."

"*Are* you so sure of yourself, Beauty?"

Beauty shook his head repudiatingly.

"Never am sure of anything, much less of myself; I'm a chameleon, a perfect chameleon!"

"Are you so sure of the King, then?"

"My dear fellow, no! I ask you in reason, how can I be sure of what isn't proved? I like that country fellow the old story tells of, he believed in fifteen shillings because he'd once had it in his hand; others he'd heard, believed in a pound; but, for his part, he didn't, because he'd never seen it. Now that was a man who'd never commit himself; he might have had the Exchequer! I'm the same; I believe, the King can win at a good many things because I've seen him do 'em; but I can't possibly tell whether he can get this, because I've never ridden him for it. I shall be able to tell you at three o'clock—but that you don't care for——"

And Bertie, exhausted with making such a lengthened exposition—the speeches he preferred were monosyllabic

—completed his sins against training with a long draught of claret-cup.

"Then, what the devil do you mean by telling us to pile our pots on you?" asked the outraged Coldstreamer with natural wrath.

"Faith is a beautiful sight!" said Bertie, with solemnity. "If *I*'m bowled over, *you*'ll be none the less sublime instances of heroic devotion——"

"Offered on the altar of the Jews!" laughed the Seraph, as he turned him away from the breakfast-table by the shoulders. "Thanks, Beauty; I've 'four figures' on you, and you'll be good enough to win them for me. Let's have a look at the King. They are just going to walk him over."

Cecil complied; while he lounged away with the others to the stables, with a face of the most calm, gentle, weary indifference in the world, the thought crossed him for a second of how *very* near he was to the wind. The figures in his betting-book were to the tune of several thousands, one way or another. If he won this morning it would be all right, of course: if he lost—even Beauty, odd mixture of devil-may-care and languor though he was, felt his lips grow, for the moment, hot and cold by turns as he thought of that possible contingency.

The King looked in splendid condition; he knew well enough what was up again, knew what was meant by that extra sedulous dressing-gown, that setting muzzle that had been buckled on him some nights previous, the limitation put to his drink, the careful trial spins in the gray of the mornings, the conclusive examination of his plates by a skilful hand; he knew what was required of him, and a horse in nobler condition never stepped out in body clothing, as he was ridden slowly down on to the plains of Iffesheim. The Austrian Dragoon, a Count

and a Chamberlain likewise, who was to ride his only possible rival, the French horse L'Etoile, pulled his tawny silken moustaches, as he saw the great English hero come up the course, and muttered to himself, "*L'affaire est finie.*" L'Etoile was a brilliant enough bay in his fashion, but Count Ruteroth knew the measure of his pace and powers too thoroughly to expect him to live against the strides of the Guards' gray.

"My beauty, won't you cut those German fellows down!" muttered Rake, the enthusiast, in the saddling inclosure. "As for those fools what go agin you, you'll put *them* in a hole, and no mistake. French horse, indeed! Why, you'll spread-eagle all them Mossoos' and Meinherrs' cattle in a brace of seconds——"

Rake's foe, the head groom, caught him up savagely. "Won't you never learn decent breedin'? When *we* wins we wins on the quiet, and when *we* loses we loses as if we liked it; all that brayin', and flauntin', and boastin' is only fit for cads. The 'oss is in tip-top condition; let him show what he can do over furren ground."

"Lucky for him, then, that he hasn't got *you* across the pigskin; you'd rope him, I believe, as soon as look at him, if it was made worth your while," retorted Rake in caustic wrath; his science of repartee chiefly lay in a successful "plant," and he was here uncomfortably conscious that his opponent was in the right of the argument, as he started through the throng to put his master into the "shell" of the Shire-famous scarlet and white.

"Tip-top condition, my boy—tip-top, and no mistake," murmured Mr. Willon, for the edification of those around them as the saddle-girths were buckled on, and the Guards' crack stood the cynosure of every eye at Iffesheim.

Then, in his capacity as head attendant on the hero, he directed the exercise-bridle to be taken off, and with his own hands adjusted a new and handsome one, slung across his arm.

"'Tis a'most a pity. 'Tis a'most a pity," thought the worthy, as he put the curb on the King; "but I shouldn't have been haggravated with that hinsolent soldiering chap. There, my boy, if you'll win with a painted quid, I'm a Dutchman."

Forest King champed his bit between his teeth a little; it tasted bitter; he tossed his head and licked it with his tongue impatiently; the taste had got down his throat and he did not like its flavor: he turned his deep, lustrous eyes with a gentle patience on the crowd about him as though asking them what was the matter with him. No one moved his bit; the only person who could have had such authority was busily giving the last polish to his coat with a fine handkerchief—that glossy neck which had been so dusted many a time with the cobweb coronet-broidered handkerchiefs of great ladies—and his instincts, glorious as they were, were not wise enough to tell him to kick his head groom down, then and there, with one mortal blow, as his poisoner and betrayer.

The King chafed under the taste of that "painted quid;" he felt a nausea as he swallowed, and he turned his handsome head with a strange, pathetic astonishment in his glance: at that moment a familiar hand stroked his mane, a familiar foot was put into his stirrup, Bertie threw himself into saddle, the lightest weight that ever gentleman-rider rode, despite his six-foot length of limb. The King, at the well-known touch, the well-loved voice, pricked his delicate ears, quivered in all his frame with eager excitation, snuffed the air restlessly through his distended nostrils, and felt every vein under his satin

skin thrill and swell with pleasure; he was all impatience, all power, all longing, vivid, intensity of life. If only that nausea would go! He felt a restless sickliness stealing on him that his young and gallant strength had never known since he was foaled. But it was not in the King to yield to a little; he flung his head up, champing angrily at the bit, then walked down to the starting-post with his old calm, collected grace; and Cecil, looking at the glossy bow of the neck, and feeling the width of the magnificent ribs beneath him, stooped from his saddle a second as he rode out of the inclosure and bent to the Seraph.

"Look at him, Rock! the thing's as good as won."

The day was very warm and brilliant; all Baden had come down to the race-course, continuous strings of carriages, with their four or six horses and postillions, held the line far down over the plains; mob, there was none, save of women in matchless toilets, and men with the highest names in the "Almanac de Gotha;" the sun shone cloudlessly on the broad, green plateau of Iffesheim, on the white amphitheatre of chalk hills, and on the glittering, silken folds of the flags of England, France, Prussia, and of the Grand Duchy itself, that floated from the summits of the Grand Stand, Pavilion, and Jockey Club.

The ladies, descending from the carriages, swept up and down on the green course that was so free from "cads" and "legs," their magnificent skirts trailing along without the risk of a grain of dust, their costly laces side by side with the Austrian uniforms of the military men from Rastadt. The betting was but slight; the Paris formulas, "Combien contre l'Etoile?" "Six cents francs sur le cheval Anglais?" echoing everywhere in odd contrast with the hubbub and striking clamor of English

betting rings; the only approach to anything like "real business" being transacted between the members of the Household and those of the Jockey Clubs. Iffesheim was pure pleasure, like every other item of Baden existence, and all aristocratic, sparkling, rich, amusement-seeking Europe seemed gathered there under the sunny skies, and on every one's lips in the titled throng was but one name—Forest King's. Even the coquettish bouquet-sellers, who remembered the dresses of his own colors which Cecil had given them last year when he had won the Rastadt, would sell nothing except little twin scarlet and white moss rose-buds, of which thousands were gathered and died that morning in honor of the English Guards' champion.

A slender event usually, the presence of the renowned crack of the Household Cavalry, made the Prix de Dames the most eagerly watched-for entry on the card, and the rest of the field were scarcely noticed as the well-known gold-broidered jacket came up at the starting-post.

The King saw that blaze of light and color over course and stands that he knew so well by the time; he felt the pressure round him of his foreign rivals as they reared and pulled and fretted and passaged; the old longing quivered in all his eager limbs, the old fire wakened in all his dauntless blood; like the charger at sound of the trumpet-call, he lived in his past victories, and was athirst for more. But yet—between him and the sunny morning there seemed a dim, hazy screen; on his delicate ear the familiar clangor smote with something dulled and strange; there seemed a numbness stealing down his frame, he shook his head in an unusual and irritated impatience, he did not know what ailed him. The hand he loved so loyally told him the work that was wanted of him, but he felt its guidance dully too, and the dry

hard, hot earth, as he struck it with his hoof, seemed to sway and heave beneath him; the opiate had stolen into his veins, and was creeping stealthily and surely to the sagacious brain, and over the clear, bright senses.

The signal for the start was given; the first mad headlong rush broke away with the force of a pent-up torrent suddenly loosened; every instinct of race and custom, and of that obedience which rendered him flexible as silk to his rider's will, sent him forward with that stride which made the Guards' crack a household word in all the Shires. For a moment he shook himself clear of all his horses, and led off in the old grand sweeping canter before the French bay three lengths in one single effort.

Then into his eyes a terrible look of anguish came; the numb and sickly nausea was upon him, his legs trembled, before his sight was a blurred whirling mist; all the strength and force and mighty life within him felt ebbing out, yet he struggled bravely. He strained, he panted, he heard the thundering thud of the first flight gaining nearer and nearer upon him, he felt his rivals closing hotter and harder in on him, he felt the steam of his opponent's smoking foam-dashed withers burn on his own flanks and shoulders, he felt the maddening pressure of a neck to neck struggle, he felt what in all his victorious life he had never known—the paralysis of *defeat*.

The glittering throngs spreading over the plains gazed at him in the sheer stupor of amazement; they saw that the famous English hero was dead beat as any used-up knacker.

One second more he strove to wrench himself through the throng of his horses, through the headlong crushing press, through—worst foe of all!—the misty darkness curtaining his sight! one second more he tried to wrestle

back the old life into his limbs, the unworn power and freshness into nerve and sinew. Then the darkness fell utterly; the mighty heart failed; he could do no more; —and his rider's hand slackened and turned him gently backward, his rider's voice sounded very low and quiet, to those who, seeing that every effort was hopeless, surged and clustered round his saddle.

"Something ails the King," said Cecil, calmly; "he is fairly knocked off his legs. Some Vet must look to him; ridden a yard farther he will fall."

Words so gently spoken!—yet in the single minute that alone had passed since they had left the Starter's Chair, a lifetime seemed to have been centered alike to Forest King and to his owner.

The field swept on with a rush without the favorite; and the Prix de Dames was won by the French bay L'Etoile.

CHAPTER X.

"Petite Reine."

When a young Prussian had shot himself the night before for Roulette losses, the event had not thrilled, startled and impressed the gay Baden gathering one tithe so gravely and so enduringly as did now the unaccountable failure of the great Guards' crack.

Men could make nothing of it save the fact that there was "something dark" somewhere. The "painted quid" had done its work more thoroughly than Willon and the Welcher had intended; they had meant that the opiate should be just sufficient to make the favorite off his speed, but not to take effects so palpable as these. It was, however, so deftly prepared, that under examination no trace could be found of it, and the results of veteri-

nary investigation, while it left unremoved the conviction that the horse had been doctored, could not explain when or how, or by what medicines. Forest King had simply "broken down;" favorites do this on the flat and over the furrow from an overstrain, from a railway journey, from a touch of cold, from a sudden decay of power, from spasm, or from vertigo; those who lose by them may think what they will of "roping," or "painting," or "nobbling," but what can they prove?

Even in the great scandals that come before the autocrats of the Jockey Club, where the tampering is clearly known, can the matter ever be really proved and sifted? Very rarely: the trainer affects stolid unconsciousness or unimpeachable respectability; the hapless stable-boy is cross-examined to protest innocence and ignorance, and most likely protest them rightly; he is accused, dismissed, and ruined; or some young jock has a "caution" out everywhere against him, and never again can get a mount even for the commonest handicap; but as a rule, the real criminals are never unearthed, and by consequence are never reached and punished.

The Household, present and absent, were heavily hit; they cared little for the "crushers" they incurred, but their champion's failure when he was in the face of Europe cut them down more terribly. The fame of the English riding-men had been trusted to Forest King and his owner, and they who had never before betrayed the trust placed in them had broken down like any screw out of a livery-stable, like any jockey bribed to "pull" at a suburban selling-race. It was fearfully bitter work, and unanimous to a voice the indignant murmur of "doctored" ran through the titled fashionable crowds on the Baden course in deep and ominous anger.

The Seraph's grand wrath poured out fulminations

against the wicked-doer whosoever he was, or wheresoever he lurked; and threatened, with a vengeance that would be no empty words, the direst chastisement of the "Club," of which both his father and himself were stewards, upon the unknown criminal. The Austrian and French nobles, while winners by the event, were scarce in less angered excitement; it seemed to cast the foulest slur upon their honor, that upon foreign ground the renowned English steeple-chaser should have been tampered with thus; and the fair ladies of either world added the influence of their silver tongues, and were eloquent in the vivacity of their sympathy and resentment with a unanimity women rarely show in favoring defeat, but usually reserve for the fairer opportunity of swaying the censer before success.

Cecil alone amid it all was very quiet; he said scarcely a word, nor could the sharpest watcher have detected an alteration in his countenance. Only once, when they talked around him of the investigations of the Club, and of the institution of inquiries to discover the guilty traitor, he looked up with a sudden, dangerous lighting of his soft, dark, hazel eyes, under the womanish length of their lashes: "When you find him, leave him to me."

The light was gone again in an instant; but those who knew the wild strain that ran in the Royallieu blood knew by it that, despite his gentle temper, a terrible reckoning for the evil done his horse might come some day from the Quietist.

He said little or nothing else, and to the sympathy and indignation expressed for him on all sides he answered with his old, listless calm. But, in truth, he barely knew what was saying or doing about him; he felt like a man stunned and crushed with the violence of some tremendous fall; the excitation, the agitation, the

angry amazement around him (growing as near clamor and tumult as was possible in those fashionable betting-circles, so free from roughs and almost free from book-makers), the conflicting opinions clashing here and there, even, indeed, the graceful condolence of the brilliant women, were insupportable to him. He longed to be out of this world which had so well amused him; he longed passionately for the first time in his life to be alone.

For he knew that with the failure of Forest King had gone the last plank that saved him from ruin; perhaps the last chance that stood between him and dishonor. He had never looked on it as within the possibilities of hazard that the horse could be defeated; now, little as those about him knew it, an absolute and irremediable disgrace fronted him. For, secure in the issue of the Prix de Dames, and compelled to weight his chances in it very heavily that his winnings might be wide enough to relieve some of the debt-pressure upon him, his losses now were great, and he knew no more how to raise the moneys to meet them than he would have known how to raise the dead.

The blow fell with crashing force; the fiercer because his indolence had persisted in ignoring his danger, and because his whole character was so naturally careless, and so habituated to ease and to enjoyment.

A bitter, heart-sick misery fell on him; the tone of honor was high with him; he might be reckless of everything else, but he could never be reckless in what infringed, or went nigh to infringe, a very stringent code. Bertie never reasoned in that way; he simply followed the instincts of his breeding without analyzing them; but these led him safely and surely right in all his dealings with his fellow-men, however open to censure his life

might be in other matters. Careless as he was, and indifferent, to levity, in many things, his ideas of honor were really very pure and elevated; he suffered proportionately now, that through the follies of his own imprudence, and the baseness of some treachery he could neither sift nor avenge, he saw himself driven down into as close a jeopardy of disgrace as ever befell a man who did not wilfully, and out of guilty coveting of its fruits, seek it.

For the first time in his life the society of his troops of acquaintance became intolerably oppressive; for the first time in his life he sought refuge from thought in the stimulus of drink, and dashed down neat Cognac as though it were iced Badminton, as he drove with his set off the disastrous plains of Iffesheim. He shook himself free of them as soon as he could; he felt the chatter round him insupportable; the men were thoroughly good-hearted, and though they were sharply hit by the day's issue, never even by implication hinted at owing the disaster to their faith in him, but the very cordiality and sympathy they showed cut him the keenest,—the very knowledge of their forbearance made his own thoughts darkest.

Far worse to Cecil than the personal destruction the day's calamity brought him was the knowledge of the entire faith these men had placed in him, and the losses which his own mistaken security had caused them. Granted he could neither guess nor avert the trickery which had brought about his failure; but none the less did he feel that he had failed them; none the less did the very generosity and magnanimity they showed him sting him like a scourge.

He got away from them at last, and wandered out alone into the gardens of the Stephanien, till the green

trees of an alley shut him in in solitude, and the only echo of the gay world of Baden was the strain of a band, the light mirth of a laugh, or the roll of a carriage sounding down the summer air.

It was eight o'clock; the sun was slanting to the west in a cloudless splendor, bathing the bright scene in a rich golden glow, and tinging to bronze the dark masses of the Black Forest. In another hour he was the expected guest of a Russian Prince at a dinner party, where all that was highest, fairest, greatest, most powerful, and most bewitching of every nationality represented there would meet; and in the midst of this radiant whirlpool of extravagance and pleasure, where every man worth owning as such was his friend, and every woman whose smile he cared for welcomed him, he knew himself as utterly alone, as utterly doomed, as the lifeless Prussian lying in the dead-house. No aid could serve him, for it would have been but to sink lower yet to ask or to take it; no power could save him from the ruin which in a few days later at the farthest would mark him out for ever an exiled, beggared, perhaps dishonored, man,—a debtor and an alien.

Where he had thrown himself on a bench beneath a mountain-ash, trying vainly to realize this thing which had come upon him, and to meet which not training, nor habit, nor a moment's grave reflection had ever done the slightest to prepare him, gazing blankly and unconsciously at the dense pine woods and rugged glens of the forest that sloped upward and around above the green and leafy nest of Baden, he watched mechanically the toiling passage of a charcoal-burner going up the hill-side in the distance through the firs.

"Those poor devils envy *us!*" he thought. "Better be one of them ten thousand times than be trained for

the Great Race, and started with the cracks, dead weighted with the penalty-shot of Poverty!"

A soft touch came on his arm as he sat there; he looked up, surprised: before him stood a dainty, delicate little form, all gay with white lace, and broideries, and rose ribbons, and floating hair fastened backward with a golden fillet; it was that of the little Lady Venetia, the only daughter of the House of Lyonnesse, by a late marriage of his Grace, the eight-year old sister of the colossal Seraph; the plaything of a young and lovely mother, who had flirted in Belgravia with her future stepson before she fell sincerely and veritably in love with the gallant and still handsome Duke.

Cecil roused himself and smiled at her; he had been by months together at Lyonnesse most years of the child's life, and had been gentle to her as he was to every living thing, though he had noticed her seldom.

"Well, Petite Reine," he said kindly, bitter as his thoughts were, calling her by the name she generally bore, "all alone; where are your playmates?"

"Petite Reine," who, to justify her *sobriquet*, was a grand, imperial, little lady, bent her delicate head—a very delicate head, indeed, carrying itself royally, young though it was.

"Ah! you know I never care for children!"

It was said so disdainfully, yet so sincerely, without a touch of affectation, and so genuinely, as the expression of a matured and contemptuous opinion, that even in that moment it amused him. She did not wait an answer, but bent nearer with an infinite pity and anxiety in her pretty eyes.

"I want to know——; you are so vexed, are you not? They say you have lost all your money!"

"Do they? They are not far wrong then. Who are 'they,' Petite Reine?"

"Oh, Prince Alexis, and the Duc de Lorance, and Mamma, and everybody. Is it true?"

"Very true, my little lady."

"Ah!" she gave a long sigh, looking pathetically at him, with her head on one side, and her lips parted; "I heard the Russian gentleman saying that you were ruined. Is *that* true, too?"

"Yes, dear," he answered wearily, thinking little of the child in the desperate excess to which his life had come.

Petite Reine stood by him silent; her proud, imperial young ladyship had a very tender heart, and she was very sorry; she had understood what had been said before her of him, vaguely indeed, and with no sense of its true meaning, yet still, with the quick perception of a brilliant and petted child. Looking at her, he saw with astonishment that her eyes were filled with tears; he put out his hand and drew her to him.

"Why, little one, what do you know of these things? How did you find me out here?"

She bent nearer to him, swaying her slender figure, with its bright gossamer muslins, like a dainty hare-bell, and lifting her face to his, earnest, beseeching, and very eager.

"I came—I came—*please* don't be angry,—because I heard them say you had no money, and I want you to take mine. Do take it! Look, it is all bright gold, and it is my own, my *very* own. Papa gives it to me to do just what I like with. Do take it; pray do!"

Coloring deeply, for the Petite Reine had that true instinct of generous natures, a most sensitive delicacy for others, but growing ardent in her eloquence and im-

ploring in her entreaty, she shook on to Cecil's knee, out of a little enamel sweetmeat box, twenty bright Napoléons that fell in a glittering shower on the grass.

He started, and looked at her in a silence that she mistook for offence. She leaned nearer, pale now with her excitement, and with her large eyes gleaming and melting with passionate entreaty.

"Don't be angry; pray take it; it is all my own, and you know I have bonbons, and books, and playthings, and ponies, and dogs till I am tired of them; I never want the money, indeed I don't. Take it, please take it; and if you will only let me ask papa or Rock they will give you thousands, and thousands of pounds if that isn't enough; do let me!"

Cecil, in silence still, stooped and drew her to him; when he spoke his voice shook ever so slightly, and he felt his eyes dim with an emotion that he had not known in all his careless life; the child's words and action touched him deeply, the caressing generous innocence of the offered gift beside the enormous extravagance and hopeless bankruptcy of his career, smote him with a keen pang, yet moved him with a strange pleasure.

"Petite Reine," he murmured gently, striving vainly for his old lightness, "Petite Reine, how some man will love you one day! Thank you from my heart, my little innocent friend."

Her face flushed with gladness; she smiled with all a child's unshadowed joy.

"Ah! then you *will* take it? and if you want more only let me ask them for it. Papa and Philip never refuse me anything!"

His hand wandered gently over the shower of her hair, as he put back the Napoléons that he had gathered up into her azure bonbonnière.

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"Petite Reine, you are a little angel; but I cannot take your money, my child, and you must ask for none for my sake from your father or from Rock. Do not look so grieved, little one; I love you none the less because I refuse it."

Petite Reine's face was very pale and grave; a delicate face, in its miniature feminine childhood almost absurdly like the Seraph's; her eyes were full of plaintive wonder and of pathetic reproach.

"Ah!" she said, drooping her head with a sigh, "it is no good to you because it is such a little; do let me ask for more!"

He smiled, but the smile was very weary.

"No, dear, you must not ask for more; I have been very foolish, my little friend, and I must take the fruits of my folly; all men must. I can accept no one's money, not even yours; when you are older and remember this, you will know why; but I do not thank you the less from my heart."

She looked at him pained and wistful.

"You will not take *anything*, Mr. Cecil?" she asked with a sigh, glancing at her rejected Napoléons.

He drew the enamel bonbonnière away.

"I will take that if you will give it me, Petite Reine, and keep it in memory of you."

As he spoke, he stooped and kissed her very gently; the act had moved him more deeply than he thought he had it in him to be moved by anything, and the child's face turned upward to him was of a very perfect and aristocratic loveliness far beyond her years. She colored as his lips touched hers, and swayed slightly from him. She was an extremely proud young sovereign, and never allowed caresses; yet she lingered by him troubled, grave, with something intensely tender and pitiful in the musing

look of her eyes. She had a perception that this calamity which smote him was one far beyond the ministering of her knowledge.

He took the pretty Palais Royal gold-rimmed sweetmeat box, and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket; it was only a child's gift, a tiny Paris toy; but it had been brought to him in a tender compassion, and he did keep it; kept it through dark days and wild nights, through the scorch of the desert and the shadows of death, till the young eyes that questioned him now with such innocent wonder had gained the grander lustre of their womanhood and had brought him a grief wider than he knew now.

At that moment, as the child stood beside him under the drooping acacia boughs, with the green sloping lower valley seen at glimpses through the wall of leaves, one of the men of the Stephanien approached him with an English letter, which, as it was marked "instant," they had laid apart from the rest of the visitors' pile of correspondence; Cecil took it wearily—nothing but fresh embarrassments could come to him from England, and looked at the little Lady Venetia.

"You will allow me?"

She bowed her graceful head; with all the naïf unconsciousness of a child, she had all the manner of the *vieille cour;* together they made her enchanting.

He broke the envelope and read;—a blurred, scrawled, miserable letter, the words erased with passionate strokes, and blotted with hot tears, and scored out in impulsive misery. It was long, yet at a glance he scanned its message and its meaning; at the first few words he knew its whole as well as though he had studied every line.

A strong tremor shook him from head to foot, a tremor at once of passionate rage and of as passionate

pain; his face blanched to a deadly whiteness; his teeth clinched as though he were restraining some bodily suffering, and he tore the letter in two and stamped it down into the turf under his heel, with a gesture as unlike his common serenity of manner as the fiery passion that darkened in his eyes was unlike the habitual softness of his too pliant and too unresentful temper. He crushed the senseless paper again and again down into the grass beneath his heel; his lips shook under the silky abundance of his beard; the natural habit of long usage kept him from all utterance, and even in the violence of its shock he remembered the young Venetia's presence; but, in that one fierce unrestrained gesture, the shame and suffering upon him broke out despite himself.

The child watched him, startled and awed. She touched his hand softly.

"What is it?—is it anything worse?"

He turned his eyes on her with a dry, hot, weary anguish in them; he was scarcely conscious what he said or what he answered.

"Worse—worse?" he repeated mechanically, while his heel still ground down in loathing the shattered paper into the grass. "There can be nothing worse! It is the vilest, blackest *shame*."

He spoke to his thoughts, not to her; the words died in his throat; a bitter agony was on him; all the golden summer evening, all the fair green world about him, were indistinct and unreal to his senses; he felt as if the whole earth were of a sudden changed; he could not realize that this thing could come to him and his—that this foul dishonor could creep up and stain them—that this infamy could ever be of them and upon them. All the ruin that before had fallen on him to-day was dwarfed

and banished; it looked nothing beside the unendurable horror that reached him now.

The gay laughter of children sounded down the air at that moment; they were the children of a French Princess seeking their playmate Venetia, who had escaped from them and from their games to find her way to Cecil; he motioned her to them; he could not bear even the clear and pitying eyes of the Petite Reine to be upon him now.

She lingered wistfully; she did not like to leave him.

"Let me stay with you," she pleaded caressingly. "You are vexed at something; I cannot help you, but Rock will —the Duke will. Do let me ask them?"

He laid his hand on her shoulder: his voice, as he answered, was hoarse and unsteady.

"No; go dear. You will please me best by leaving me. Ask none—tell none; I can trust you to be silent, Petite Reine."

She gave him a long, earnest look.

"Yes," she answered simply and gravely, as one who accepts, and not lightly, a trust.

Then she went slowly and lingeringly, with the sun on the gold fillet binding her hair, but the tears heavy on the shadow of her silken lashes. When next they met again the lustre of a warmer sun that once burned on the white walls of the palaces of Phœnicia and the leaping flames of the Temple of the God of Healing, shone upon them, and through the veil of those sweeping lashes there gazed the resistless sovereignty of a proud and patrician womanhood.

Alone, his head sank down upon his hands, he gave reins to the fiery scorn, the acute suffering which turn by turn seized him with every moment that seared the words of the letter deeper and deeper down into his brain. Un-

til this he had never known what it was to suffer; until this his languid creeds had held that no wise man feels strongly, and that to glide through life untroubled and unmoved is as possible as it is politic. Now he suffered, he suffered dumbly as a dog, passionately as a barbarian; now he was met by that which, in the moment of its dealing, pierced his panoplies of indifference, and escaped his light philosophies.

"Oh, God!" he thought, "if it were anything—anything—except Disgrace!"

In a miserable den, an hour or so before—there are miserable dens even in Baden, that gold-decked rendezvous of princes, where crowned heads are numberless as couriers, and great ministers must sometimes be content with a shake-down—two men sat in consultation. Though the chamber was poor and dark, their table was loaded with various expensive wines and liqueurs; of a truth, they were flush of money, and selected this poor place from motives of concealment rather than of necessity. One of them was the "Welcher," Ben Davis; the other, a smaller, quieter man, with a keen vivacious Hebrew eye and an olive-tinted skin, a Jew, Ezra Baroni. The Jew was cool, sharp, and generally silent; the "Welcher," heated, eager, flushed with triumph, and glowing with a gloating malignity. Excitement and the fire of very strong wines, of whose vintage brandy formed a large part, had made him voluble in exultation; the monosyllabic sententiousness that had characterized him in the loose-box at Royallieu had been dissipated under the ardor of success; and Ben Davis, with his legs on the table, a pipe between his teeth, and his bloated face purple with a brutal contentment, might have furnished to a Teniers the personification of culminated cunning and of delighted tyranny.

"That precious Guards' swell!" he muttered gloatingly for the hundredth time. "I've paid him out at last! *He* won't take a 'Walk Over' again in a hurry. Cuss them swells! they allays die so game; it ain't half a go after all, giving 'em a facer; they just come up to time so cool under it all, and never show they are down, even when their backers throw up the sponge. You can't make 'em *give in*, not even when they're mortal hit; that's the crusher of it."

"Vell, vhat matter that ven you *have* hit 'em," expostulated the more philosophic Jew.

"Why, it is a fleecin' of one," retorted the Welcher, savagely even amid his successes. "A clear fleecin' of one. If one gets the better of a dandy chap like that, and brings him down neat and clean, one ought to have the spice of it. One ought to see him wince and——cuss 'em all!—that's just what they'll never do. No! not if it was ever so. You may pitch into 'em like Old Harry, and those d——d fine gentlemen 'll just look as if they liked it. You might strike 'em dead at your feet, and it's my belief, while they was cold as stones, they'd manage to look *not beaten yet.* It's a fleecin' of one—a fleecin' of one!" he growled afresh, draining down a great draught of brandy-heated Roussillon to drown the impatient conviction which possessed him that, let him triumph as he would, there would ever remain, in that fine intangible sense which his coarse nature could feel, though he could not have further defined it, a superiority in his adversary he could not conquer, a difference between him and his prey he could not bridge over.

The Jew laughed a little.

"Vot a shild you are, you Big Ben! Vot matter how he look, so long as you have de success and pocket de monish?"

Big Ben gave a long growl like a mastiff tearing to reach a bone just held above him.

"Hang the blunt! The yellows ain't a quarter worth to me what it 'ud be to see him just *look* as if he knew he was knocked over. Besides, laying agin' him by that ere commission's piled up hatsfull of the ready to be sure, I don't say it hain't, but there's two thou' knocked off for Willon, and the fool don't deserve a tizzy of it; he went and put the paint on so thick that if the Club don't have a flare-up about the whole thing——"

"Let dem!" said the Jew serenely. "Dey can do vot dey like; dey von't get to de bottom of de vell. Dat Villon is sharp; he vill know how to keep his tongue still; dey can prove nothin'; dey may give de sack to a stable-boy, or dey may tink themselves mighty bright in seein' a mare's nest, but dey vill never come to *us*."

The Welcher gave a loud horse-guffaw of relish and enjoyment.

"No! We know the ins and outs of Turf Law a trifle too well to be caught napping. A neater thing weren't ever done, if it hadn't been that the paint was put a trifle too thick. The 'oss should have just *run ill*, and not knocked over clean out o' time like that. However, there ain't no odds a cryin' over spilt milk. If the Club *do* come a inquiry, we'll show 'em a few tricks that'll puzzle 'em. But it's my belief they'll let it off on the quiet; there ain't a bit of evidence to show the 'oss was doctored, and the way he went stood quite as well for having been knocked off his feed and off his legs by the woyage and sich like. And now you go and put that swell to the grindstone for Act 2 of the comedy, will yer?"

Ezra Baroni smiled where he leant against the table looking over some papers.

"Dis is a delicate matter; don't you come putting your big paw in it—you'll spoil it all."

Ben Davis growled afresh:

"No, I ain't a goin'. You know as well as me I can't show in the thing. Hanged if I wouldn't a'most lief risk a lifer out at Botany Bay for the sake o' wringin' my fine feathered bird myself, but I daresn't; if he was to see me in it all 'ud be up. You must do it. Get along; you look uncommon respectable. If your coat tails was a little bit longer, you might right and away be took for a parson."

The Jew laughed softly, the Welcher grimly, at the compliment they paid the Church; Baroni put up his papers into a neat Russia letter book. Excellently dressed, without a touch of flashiness, he did look eminently respectable—and lingered a moment——

"I say, dear shild, vat if de Marquis vant to buy off and hush up? Ten to von he vill; he care no more for monish than for dem macaroons, and he love his friend, dey say."

Ben Davis took his legs off the table with a crash, and stood up, flushed, thirstily eager, almost aggressive in his peremptory excitement.

"Without wringing my dainty bird's neck? Not for a million paid out o' hand! Without crushing my fine gentleman down into powder? Not for all the blunt of every one o' the Rothschilds! Curse his woman's face! I've got to keep dark now, but when he's crushed, and smashed, and ruined, and pilloried, and druv' out of this fine world, and warned off of all his aristocratic race-courses, *then* I'll come in and take a look at him; then I'll see my brilliant gentleman a worn-out, broken-down swindler, a dyin' in a bagnio!"

The intense malignity, the brutal hungry lust for ven-

geance that inspired the words, lent their coarse vulgarity something that was for the moment almost tragical in its strength, almost horrible in its passion. Ezra Baroni looked at him quietly, then without another word went out—to a congenial task.

"Dat big shild is a fool," mused the subtler and gentler Jew. "Vengeance is but de breath of de vind, it blow for you one day, it blow against you de next: de only real good is monish."

The Seraph had ridden back from Iffesheim to the Bad in company with some Austrian officers, and one or two of his own comrades. He had left the Course late, staying to exhaust every possible means of inquiry as to the failure of Forest King, and to discuss with other members of the Newmarket and foreign jockey clubs the best methods—if methods there were—of discovering what foul play had been on foot with the horse. That there was some, and very foul too, the testimony of men and angels would not have dissuaded the Seraph, and the event had left him most unusually grave and regretful.

The amount he had lost himself, in consequence, was of not the slightest moment to him, although he was extravagant enough to run almost to the end even of his own princely tether in money matters; but that "Beauty" should be cut down was more vexatious to him than any evil accident that could have befallen himself, and he guessed pretty nearly the terrible influence the dead failure would have on his friend's position.

True, he had never heard Cecil breathe a syllable that hinted at embarrassment; but these things get known with tolerable accuracy about the town, and those who were acquainted, as most people in their set were, with the impoverished condition of the Royallieu Exchequer, however hidden it might be under an unabated magni-

ficence of living, were well aware also that none of the old Viscount's sons could have any safe resources to guarantee them from as rapid a ruin as they liked to consummate. Indeed, it had of late been whispered that it was probable, despite the provisions of the entail, that all the green wealth and Norman beauty of Royallieu itself would come into the market. Hence the Seraph, the best-hearted and most generous-natured of men, was worried by an anxiety and a despondency which he would never have indulged most assuredly on his own account, as he rode away from Iffesheim after the defeat of his Corps' champion.

He was expected to dinner with one of the most lovely of foreign Ambassadresses, and was to go with her afterward to the Vaudeville, at the pretty golden theatre, where a *troupe* from the Bouffes were playing; but he felt anything but in the mood for even her bewitching and —in a marriageable sense—safe society, as he stopped his horse at his own hotel, the Badischer Hof.

As he swung himself out of saddle, a well-dressed, quiet, rather handsome little man drew near respectfully, lifting his hat,—it was M. Baroni. The Seraph had never seen the man in his life that he knew of, but he was himself naturally frank, affable, courteous, and never given to hedging himself behind the pale of his high rank; provided you did not bore him, you might always get access to him easily enough—the Duke used to tell him, too easily.

Therefore, when Ezra Baroni deferentially approached "the Most Noble the Marquis of Rockingham, I think?" the Seraph, instead of leaving the stranger there discomfited, nodded and paused with his inconsequent good nature, thinking how much less bosh it would be if everybody could call him like his family and his comrades, "Rock."

"That is my name," he answered. "I do not know you; do you want anything of me?"

The Seraph had a vivid terror of people who "wanted him," in the subscription, not the police, sense of the word; and had been the victim of frauds innumerable.

"I wished," returned Baroni respectfully, but with sufficient independence to conciliate his auditor, whom he saw at a glance cringing subservience would disgust, "to have the opportunity of asking your lordship a very simple question."

The Seraph looked a little bored, a little amused.

"Well, ask it, my good fellow; you have your opportunity!" he said impatiently, yet good-humored still.

"Then would you, my lord," continued the Jew with his strong Hebrew-German accent, "be so good as to favor me by saying whether this signature be your own?"

The Jew held before him a folded paper, so folded that one line only was visible, across which was dashed in bold characters, *Rockingham.*

The Seraph put up his eye-glass, stooped, and took a steadfast look, then shook his head.

"No; that is not mine, at least I think not. Never made my R half a quarter so well in my life."

"Many thanks, my lord," said Baroni quietly. "One question more and we can substantiate the fact. Did your lordship indorse any bill on the 15th of last month?"

The Seraph looked surprised, and reflected a moment. "No, I didn't," he said, after a pause; "I have done it for men, but not on that day; I was shooting at Hornsey Wood most of it, if I remember right. Why do you ask?"

"I will tell you, my lord, if you grant me a private interview."

The Seraph moved away. "Never do that," he said, briefly; "private interviews," thought he, acting on past experience, "with women always mean proposals, and with men always mean extortion."

Baroni made a quick movement toward him.

"An instant, my lord! This intimately concerns yourself. The steps of an hotel is surely not the place in which to speak of it?"

"I wish to hear nothing about it," replied Rock, putting him aside; while he thought to himself regretfully, "That *is* 'stiff,' that bit of paper; perhaps some poor wretch is in a scrape. I wish I hadn't so wholly denied my signature. If the mischief's done there's no good in bothering the fellow."

The Seraph's good nature was apt to overlook such trifles as the Law.

Baroni kept pace with him as he approached the hotel door, and spoke very low.

"My lord, if you do *not* listen worse may befall the reputation both of your regiment and your friends."

The Seraph swung round; his careless handsome face set stern in an instant; his blue eyes grave, and gathering an ominous fire.

"Step yonder," he said curtly, signing the Hebrew toward the grand staircase. "Show that person to my rooms, Alexis."

But for the publicity of the entrance of the Badischer Hof the mighty right arm of the Guardsman might have terminated the interview then and there in different fashion. Baroni had gained his point, and was ushered into the fine chambers set apart for the future Duke of Lyonnesse; the Seraph strode after him, and as the at-

tendant closed the door and left them alone in the first of the great lofty suite, all glittering with gilding, and ormolu, and malachite, and rose velvet, and Parisian taste, stood like a tower above the Jew's small, slight form; while his words came curtly, and only by a fierce effort through his lips.

"Substantiate what you dare to say, or my grooms shall throw you out of that window!—now?"

Baroni looked up unmoved; the calm, steady, undisturbed glance sent a chill over the Seraph; he thought if this man came but for purposes of extortion, and were not fully sure that he could make good what he had said, this was not the look he would give.

"I desire nothing better, my lord," said Baroni, quietly, "though I greatly regret to be the messenger of such an errand. This bill, which in a moment I will have the honor of showing you, was transacted by my house (I am one of the partners of a London discounting firm), indorsed thus by your celebrated name. Moneys were lent on it, the bill was made payable at two months' date, it was understood that you accepted it, there could be no risk with such a signature as yours. The bill was negotiated, I was in Leyden, Lubeck, and other places at the period, I heard nothing of the matter; when I returned to London, a little less than a week ago, I saw the signature for the first time. I was at once aware that it was not yours, for I had some paid bills, signed by you, at hand, with which I compared it. Of course, my only remedy was to seek you out, although I was nearly certain before your present denial that the bill was a forgery."

He spoke quite tranquilly still, with a perfectly respectful regret, but with the air of a man who has his title to be heard, and is acting simply in his own clear

right. The Seraph listened restless, impatient, sorely tried to keep the passion in which had been awakened by the hint that this wretched matter could concern or attaint the honor of his corps.

"Well! speak out!" he said, impatiently. "Details are nothing. Who drew it? Who forged my name, if it *be* forged? Quick! give me the paper."

"With every trust and every deference, my lord, I cannot let the bill pass out of my own hands until this unfortunate matter be cleared up—if cleared up it can be. Your lordship shall see the bill, however, of course, spread here upon the table, but first, let me warn you, my Lord Marquis, that the sight will be intensely painful to you. Very painful, my lord," added Baroni, impressively. "Prepare yourself for——"

Rock dashed his hand down on the marble table with a force that made the lustres and the statuettes on it ring and tremble.

"No more words! Lay the bill there."

Baroni bowed and smoothed out upon the console the crumpled document, holding it with one hand, yet leaving visible with the counterfeited signature, one other, the name of the forger in whose favor the bill was drawn; that other signature was——*Bertie Cecil.*

"I deeply regret to deal you such a blow from such a friend, my lord," said the Jew softly. The Seraph stooped and gazed—one instant of horrified amazement kept him dumb there, staring at the written paper as at some ghastly thing; then all the hot blood rushed over his fair, bold face, he flung himself on the Hebrew, and ere the other could have breath or warning tossed him upward to the painted ceiling and hurled him down again upon the velvet carpet, as lightly as a retriever will catch

up and let fall a wild duck or a grouse, and stood over Baroni where he lay.

"You hound!"

Baroni, lying passive and breathless with the violence of the shock and the surprise, yet keeping, even amid the hurricane of wrath that had tossed him upward and downward as the winds toss leaves, his hold upon the document, and his clear, cool, ready self-possession.

"My lord," he said, faintly, "I do not wonder at your excitement, aggressive as it renders you; but I cannot admit that false which I know to be a for——"

"Silence! Say that word once more and I shall forget myself, and hurl you out into the street like the dog of a Jew you are!"

"Have patience an instant, my lord. Will it profit your friend and brother-in-arms if it be afterward said that when this charge was brought against him, you, my Lord Rockingham, had so little faith in his power to refute it that you bore down with all your mighty strength in a personal assault upon one so weakly as myself, and sought to put an end to the evidence against him by bodily threats against my safety, and by—what will look, legally, my lord, like—an attempt to coerce me into silence, and to obtain the paper from my hands by violence?"

Faint and hoarse the words were, but they were spoken with quiet confidence, with admirable acumen; they were the very words to lash the passions of his listener into unendurable fire, yet to chain them powerless down; the Guardsman stood above him, his features flushed and dark with rage, his eyes literally blazing with fury, his lips working under his tawny leonine beard. At every syllable he could have thrown himself afresh upon the Jew and flung him out of his presence as so

much carrion; yet the impotence that truth so often feels caught and meshed in the coils of subtlety, the desperate disadvantage at which Right is so often placed when met by the cunning science and sophistry of Wrong, held the Seraph in their net now. He saw his own rashness, he saw how his actions could be construed till they cast a slur even on the man he defended, he saw how legally he was in error, how legally the gallant vengeance of an indignant friendship might be construed into consciousness of guilt in the accused for whose sake the vengeance fell.

He stood silent, overwhelmed with the intensity of his own passion, baffled by the ingenuity of a serpent-wisdom he could not refute.

Ezra Baroni saw his advantage: he ventured to raise himself slightly.

"My lord, since your faith in your friend is so perfect, send for him. If he be innocent, and I a liar, with a look I shall be confounded."

The tone was perfectly impassive, but the words expressed a world. For a moment the Seraph's eyes flashed on him with a look that made him feel nearer his death than he had been near to it in all his days; but Rockingham restrained himself from force.

"I *will* send for him," he said briefly; in that answer there was more of menace and of meaning than in any physical action.

He moved, and let Baroni rise, shaken and bruised, but otherwise little seriously hurt, and still holding, in a tenacious grasp, the crumpled paper. He rang; his own servant answered the summons.

"Go to the Stephanien and inquire for Mr. Cecil. Be quick; and request him, wherever he be, to be so good as to come to me instantly—here."

The servant bowed and withdrew; a perfect silence followed between these two so strangely assorted companions; the Seraph stood with his back against the mantlepiece, with every sense on the watch to catch every movement of the Jew's, and to hear the first sound of Cecil's approach. The minutes dragged on, the Seraph was in an agony of probation and impatience. Once the attendants entered to light the chandeliers and candelabra; the full light fell on the dark, slight form of the Hebrew, and on the superb attitude and the fair, frank, proud face of the standing Guardsman; neither moved—once more they were left alone.

The moments ticked slowly away one by one, audible in the silence. Now and then the quarters chimed from the clock; it was the only sound in the chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

For a Woman's Sake.

THE door opened—Cecil entered.

The Seraph crossed the room, with his hand held out; not for his life in that moment would he have omitted that gesture of friendship. Involuntarily he started and stood still one instant in amaze; the next, he flung thought away and dashed into swift, inconsequent words.

"Cecil, my dear fellow!—I'm ashamed to send for you on such a blackguard errand. Never heard of such a swindler's trick in all my life; couldn't pitch the fellow into the street because of the look of the thing, and can't take any other measures without *you*, you know. I only sent for you to expose the whole abominable business, never because I believe——Hang it! Beauty, I can't bring myself to say it even! If a sound thrashing would

have settled the matter, I wouldn't have bothered you about it, nor told you a syllable. Only you *are* sure, Bertie, arn't you, that I never listened to this miserable outrage on us both with a second's thought there could be truth in it? You know me? you trust me too well not to be certain of that?"

The incoherent address poured out from his lips in a breathless torrent: he had never been so excited in his life; and he pleaded with as imploring an earnestness as though he had been the suspected criminal, not to be accused with having one shadow of shameful doubt against his friend. His words would have told nothing except bewilderment to one who should have been a stranger to the subject on which he spoke; yet Cecil never asked even what he meant. There was no surprise upon his face, no flush of anger, no expression of amaze or indignation, only the look which had paralyzed Rock on his entrance; he stood still and mute.

The Seraph looked at him, a great dread seizing him lest he should have seemed himself to cast this foul thing on his brother-in-arms; and in that dread all the fierce fire of his freshly-loosened passion broke its bounds.

"Damnation! Cecil, can't you hear me? A hound has brought against you the vilest charge that ever swindlers framed: an infamy that he deserves to be shot for, as if he were a dog. He makes me stand before you as if *I* were your accuser; as if *I* doubted you; as if *I* lent an ear one second to his loathsome lie. I sent for you to confront him, and to give him up to the law. Stand out, you scoundrel, and let us see how you dare look at us now!"

He swung round at the last words, and signed to Baroni to rise from the couch where he sat. The Jew advanced slowly, softly.

"If your lordship will pardon me, you have scarcely made it apparent what the matter is for which this gentleman is wanted. You have scarcely explained to him that it is on a charge of forgery."

The Seraph's eyes flashed on him with a light like a lion's, and his right hand clinched hard.

"By my life! if you say that word again you shall be flung in the street, like the cur you are, let me pay what I will for it. Cecil, why don't you speak?"

Bertie had not moved; not a breath escaped his lips. He stood like a statue, deadly pale in the gas-light; when the figure of Baroni rose up and came before him, a great darkness stole on his face—it was a terrible bitterness, a great horror, a loathing disgust; but it was scarcely criminality, and it was not fear. Still he stood perfectly silent—a guilty man, any other than his loyal friend would have said: guilty, and confronted with a just accuser. The Seraph saw that look, and a deadly chill passed over him, as it had done at the Jew's first charge — not doubt; such heresy to his creeds, such shame to his comrade and his corps could not be in him, but a vague dread hushed his impetuous vehemence. The dignity of the old Lyonnesse blood asserted its ascendency.

"Monsieur Baroni, make your statement. Later on, Mr. Cecil can avenge it."

Cecil never moved; once his eyes went to Rockingham with a look of yearning, grateful, unendurable pain, but it was repressed instantly; a perfect passiveness was on him. The Jew smiled.

"My statement is easily made, and will not be so new to this gentleman as it was to your lordship. I simply charge the Honorable Bertie Cecil with having negotiated a bill with my firm for £750, on the 15th of last month,

drawn in his own favor, and accepted at two month's date by your lordship. Your signature you, my Lord Marquis, admit to be a forgery—with that forgery I charge your friend."

"The 15th!"

The echo of those words alone escaped the dry white lips of Cecil; he showed no amaze, no indignation; once only, as the charge was made, he gave a sudden gesture, with a sudden gleam, so dark, so dangerous, in his eyes, that his comrade thought and hoped that with one moment more the Jew would be dashed down at his feet with the lie branded on his mouth by the fiery blow of a slandered and outraged honor. The action was repressed; the extraordinary quiescence, more hopeless because more resigned than any sign of pain or of passion, returned either by force of self-control or by the stupor of despair.

The Seraph gazed at him with a fixed, astounded horror; he could not believe his senses; he could not realise what he saw. His dearest friend stood mute beneath the charge of lowest villany—stood powerless before the falsehoods of a Jew extortioner!

"Bertie! Great Heaven!" he cried, well-nigh beside himself, "how can you stand silent there? Do you hear —do you hear aright? Do you know the accursed thing this conspiracy has tried to charge you with? Say *something*, for the love of God! *I* will have vengeance on your slanderer, if you take none."

He had looked for the rise of the same passion that rang in his own imperious words, for the fearless wrath of an insulted gentleman, the instantaneous outburst of a contemptuous denial, the fire of scorn, the lightning flash of fury—all that he gave himself, all that must be so naturally given by a slandered man under a libel that

brands him with disgrace. He had looked for these as surely as he looked for the setting of one sun and the rise of another; he would have staked his life on the course of his friend's conduct as he would upon his own, and a ghastly terror sent a pang to his heart.

Still—Cecil stood silent; there was a strange, set, repressed anguish on his face that made it chill as stone; there was an unnatural calm upon him; yet he lifted his head with a gesture haughty for the moment as any action that his defender could have wished.

"I am not guilty," he said simply.

The Seraph's hands were on his own in a close, eager grasp almost ere the words were spoken.

"Beauty, Beauty! never say that to *me*. Do you think *I* can ever doubt you?"

For a moment Cecil's head sank, the dignity with which he had spoken remained on him, but the scorn of his defiance and his denial faded.

"No, *you* cannot; *you* never will."

The words were spoken almost mechanically, like a man in a dream. Ezra Baroni, standing calmly there with the tranquillity that an assured power alone confers, smiled slightly once more.

"You are not guilty, Mr. Cecil? I shall be charmed if we can find it so. Your proofs?"

"Proof? I give you *my word*."

Baroni bowed, with a sneer at once insolent but subdued.

"We men of business, sir, are—perhaps inconveniently for gentlemen—given to a preference in favor of something more substantial. Your word, doubtless, is your bond among your acquaintance; it is a pity for you that your friend's name should have been added to the bond you placed with us. Business men's pertinacity is a little

wearisome, no doubt, to officers and members of the aristocracy like yourself; but all the same I must persist —how can you disprove this charge?"

The Seraph turned on him with the fierceness of a bloodhound.

"You dog! If you use that tone again in my presence, I will double-thong you till you cannot breathe!"

Baroni laughed a little; he felt secure now, and could not resist the pleasure of braving and of torturing the "aristocrats."

"I don't doubt your will or your strength, my lord; but neither do I doubt the force of the law to make you account for any brutality of the prize-ring your lordship may please to exert on me."

The Seraph ground his heel into the carpet.

"We waste words on that wretch," he said abruptly to Cecil. "Prove his insolence the lie it is, and we will deal with him later on."

"Precisely what I said, my lord," murmured Baroni. "Let Mr. Cecil prove his innocence."

Into Bertie's eyes came a hunted, driven desperation. He turned them on Rockingham with a look that cut him to the heart; yet the abhorrent thought crossed him—was it thus that men guiltless looked?

"Mr. Cecil was with my partner at 7.50 on the evening of the 15th. It was long over business hours, but my partner to oblige him stretched a point," pursued the soft, bland, malicious voice of the German Jew. "If he were not at our office—where was he? That is simple enough."

"Answered in a moment!" said the Seraph, with impetuous certainty. "Cecil!—to prove this man what he is, not for an instant to satisfy me—where were you at that time on the 15th?"

"The 15th!"

"Where *were* you?" pursued his friend. "Were you at mess? at the clubs? dressing for dinner?—where? where? There must be thousands of ways of remembering—thousands of people who'll prove it for you?"

Cecil stood mute still; his teeth clinched on his under lip; he could not speak;—a woman's reputation lay in his silence.

"*Can't* you remember?" implored the Seraph. "You will think—you must think!"

There was a feverish entreaty in his voice. That hunted helplessness with which a question so slight yet so momentous was received, was forcing in on him a thought that he flung away like an asp.

Cecil looked both of them full in the eyes—both his accuser and his friend. He was held as speechless as though his tongue were paralyzed; he was bound by his word of honor; he was weighted with a woman's secret.

"Don't look at me so, Bertie, for mercy's sake! Speak! *where* were you?"

"I cannot tell you; but I was not there."

The words were calm; there was a great resolve in them, moreover; but his voice was hoarse and his lips shook. He paid a bitter price for the butterfly pleasure of a summer-day love.

"Cannot tell me?—*cannot?* You mean you have forgotten!"

"I cannot tell you; it is enough."

There was an almost fierce and sullen desperation in the answer; its firmness was not shaken, but the ordeal was terrible. A woman's reputation,—a thing so lightly thrown away with an idler's word, a Lovelace's smile!—that was all he had to sacrifice to clear himself from the

toils gathering around him. That was all! And his word of honor.

Baroni bent his head with an ironic mockery of sympathy.

"I feared so, my lord. Mr. Cecil 'cannot tell.' As it happens, my partner *can* tell. Mr. Cecil was with him at the hour and on the day I specify; and Mr. Cecil transacted with him the bill that I have had the honor of showing you——"

"Let *me* see it."

The request was peremptory to imperiousness, yet Cecil would have faced his death far sooner than he would have looked upon that piece of paper.

Baroni smiled.

"It is not often that we treat gentlemen under misfortune in the manner we treat you, sir; they are usually dealt with more summarily, less mercifully. You must excuse altogether my showing you the document; both you and his lordship are officers skilled, I believe, in the patrician science of fist-attack."

He could not deny himself the pleasure and the rarity of insolence to the men before him, so far above him in social rank, yet at that juncture so utterly at his mercy.

"You mean that we should fall foul of you and seize it?" thundered Rockingham in the magnificence of his wrath. "Do you judge the world by your own wretched villanies? Let him see the paper; lay it there, or, as there is truth on earth, I will kill you where you stand."

The Jew quailed under the fierce flashing of those leonine eyes. He bowed with that tact which never forsook him.

"I confide it to *your* honor, my Lord Marquis," he said, as he spread out the bill on the console. He was an able diplomatist.

Cecil leaned forward and looked at the signatures dashed across the paper; both who saw him saw also the shiver, like a shiver of intense cold, that ran through him as he did so, and saw his teeth clinch tight, in the extremity of rage, in the excess of pain, or—to hold in all utterance that might be on his lips.

"Well?" asked the Seraph, in a breathless anxiety. He knew not what to believe, what to do, whom to accuse of, or how to unravel this mystery of villany and darkness; but he felt, with a sickening reluctance which drove him wild, that his friend did not act in this thing as he should have acted; not as men of assured innocence and secure honor act beneath such a charge. Cecil was unlike himself, unlike every deed and word of his life, unlike every thought of the Seraph's fearless expectance, when he had looked for the coming of the accused as the signal for the sure and instant unmasking, condemnation, and chastisement of the false accuser.

"Do you still persist in denying your criminality in the face of that bill, Mr. Cecil?" asked the bland, sneering, courteous voice of Ezra Baroni.

"I do. I never wrote either of those signatures; I never saw that document until to-night."

The answer was firmly given, the old blaze of scorn came again in his weary eyes, and his regard met calmly and unflinchingly the looks fastened on him; but the nerves of his lips twitched, his face was haggard as by a night's deep gambling; there was a heavy dew on his forehead;—it was not the face of a wholly guiltless, of a wholly unconscious man; often even as innocence may be unwittingly betrayed into what wears the semblance of self-condemnation.

"And yet you equally persist in refusing to account

for your occupation of the early evening hours of the 15th? Unfortunate!"

"I do; but in your account of them you lie."

There was a sternness inflexible as steel in the brief sentence. Under it for an instant, though not visibly, Baroni flinched; and a fear of the man he accused smote him, more deep, more keen than that with which the sweeping might of the Seraph's fury had moved him. He knew now why Ben Davis had hated with so deadly a hatred the latent strength that slept under the Quietist languor and nonchalance of "the d——d Guards' swell."

What he felt, however, did not escape him by the slightest sign.

"As a matter of course you deny it!" he said with a polite wave of his hand. "Quite right; you are not required to criminate yourself. I wish sincerely we were not compelled to criminate you."

The Seraph's grand, rolling voice broke in; he had stood chafing, chained, panting, in agonies of passion and of misery.

"M. Baroni!" he said, hotly, the furious vehemence of his anger and his bewilderment obscuring in him all memory of either law or fact, "you have heard his signature and your statements alike denied once for all by Mr. Cecil. Your document is a libel and a conspiracy, like your charge; it is false, and you are swindling; it is an outrage, and you are a scoundrel; you have schemed this infamy for the sake of extortion; not a sovereign will you obtain through it. Were the accusation you dare to make true, I am the only one whom it can concern, since it is my name which is involved. Were it true,—could it possibly be true,—I should forbid any steps to be taken in it; I should

desire it ended once and for ever. It shall be so now, by God!"

He scarcely knew what he was saying, yet what he did say, utterly as it defied all checks of law or circumstance, had so gallant a ring, had so kingly a wrath, that it awed and impressed even Baroni in the instant of its utterance.

"They say that those fine gentlemen fight like a thousand lions when they are once roused," he thought. "I can believe it."

"My lord," he said, softly, "you have called me by many epithets, and menaced me with many threats since I have entered this chamber; it is not a wise thing to do with a man who knows the law. However, I can allow for the heat of your excitement. As regards the rest of your speech, you will permit me to say that its wildness of language is only equalled by the utter irrationality of your deductions, and your absolute ignorance of all legalities. Were you alone concerned and alone the discoverer of this fraud, you could prosecute or not as you please; but we are the subjects of its imposition, ours is the money that he has obtained by that forgery, and we shall in consequence open the prosecution."

"Prosecution!" The echo rang in an absolute agony from his hearer; he had thought of it as, at its worst, only a question between himself and Cecil.

The accused gave no sign, the rigidity and composure he had sustained throughout did not change; but at the Seraph's accent the hunted and pathetic misery which had once before gleamed in his eyes came there again; he held his comrade in a loyal and exceeding love. He would have let all the world stone him, but he could not have borne that his friend should cast even a look of contempt.

"Prosecution!" replied Baroni quietly. "It is a matter of course, my lord, that Mr. Cecil denies the accusation; it is very wise; the law specially cautions the accused to say nothing to criminate themselves. But we waste time in words; and, pardon me, if you have your friend's interest at heart, you will withdraw this very stormy championship, this utterly useless opposition to an inevitable line of action. I *must* arrest Mr. Cecil; but I am willing—for I know to high families these misfortunes are terribly distressing—to conduct everything with the strictest privacy and delicacy. In a word, if you and he consult his interests, he will accompany me unresistingly; otherwise I must summon legal force. Any opposition will only compel a very unseemly encounter of physical force, and with it the publicity I am desirous, for the sake of his relatives and position, to spare him."

A dead silence followed his words, the silence that follows on an insult that cannot be averted or avenged, on a thing too hideously shameful for the thoughts to grasp it as reality.

In the first moment of Baroni's words, Cecil's eyes had gleamed again with that dark and desperate flash of a passion that would have been worse to face even than his comrade's wrath; it died, however, well-nigh instantly, repressed by a marvellous strength of control, whatever its motive. He was simply, as he had been throughout, passive—so passive that even Ezra Baroni, who knew what the Seraph never dreamt, looked at him in wonder, and felt a faint sickly fear of that singular unbroken calm. It perplexed him—the first thing which had ever done so in his own peculiar paths of finesse and of intrigue.

The one placed in ignorance between them, at once as it were the judge and champion of his brother-at-

arms, felt wild and blind under this unutterable shame, which seemed to net them both in such close and hopeless meshes. He, heir to one of the greatest coronets in the world, must see his friend branded as a common felon, and could do no more to aid or to avenge him than if he were a charcoal-burner toiling yonder in the pine woods! His words were hoarse and broken as he spoke:

"Cecil, tell me—what is to be done? This infamous outrage cannot pass! cannot go on! I will send for the Duke, for——"

"Send for no one."

Bertie's voice was slightly weaker, like that of a man exhausted by a long struggle, but it was firm and very quiet. Its composure fell on Rockingham's tempestuous grief and rage with a sickly, silencing awe, with a terrible sense of some evil here beyond his knowledge and ministering, and of an impotence alike to act and to serve, to defend and to avenge—the deadliest thing his fearless life had ever known.

"Pardon me, my lord," interposed Baroni, "I can waste time no more. You must be now convinced yourself of your friend's implication in this very distressing affair."

"*I!*" The Seraph's majesty of haughtiest amaze and scorn blazed from his azure eyes on the man who dared say this thing to him. "*I!* If you dare hint such a damnable shame to my face again, I will wring your neck with as little remorse as I would a kite's. *I* believe in his guilt? Forgive me, Cecil, that I can even repeat the world! *I* believe in it? I would as soon believe in my own disgrace—in my father's dishonor!"

"How will your lordship account, then, for Mr. Cecil's total inability to tell us how he spent the hours between six and nine on the 15th?"

"Unable? He is not unable; he declines! Bertie, tell *me* what you did that one cursed evening? Whatever it was, wherever it was, say it for my sake, and shame this devil."

Cecil would more willingly have stood a line of levelled rifle-tubes aimed at his heart than that passionate entreaty from the man he loved best on earth. He staggered slightly, as if he were about to fall, and a faint white foam came on his lips; but he recovered himself almost instantly. It was so natural to him to repress every emotion that it was simply old habit to do so now.

"I have answered," he said very low, each word a pang,—"I cannot."

Baroni waved his hand again with the same polite significant gesture.

"In that case, then, there is but one alternative. Will you follow me quietly, sir, or must force be employed?"

"I will go with you."

The reply was very tranquil, but in the look that met his own as it was given, Baroni saw that some other motive than that of any fear was its spring; that some cause beyond the mere abhorrence of a "scene" was at the root of the quiescence.

"It must be so," said Cecil huskily to his friend. "This man is right, so far as he knows. He is only acting on his own convictions. We cannot blame him. The whole is—a mystery, an error. But, as it stands, there is no resistance."

"Resistance! By God! I would resist if I shot him dead, or shot myself. Stay—wait—one moment! If it be an error in the sense you mean, it must be a forgery of your name as of mine. You think that?"

"I did not say so."

The Seraph gave him a rapid, shuddering glance; for once the suspicion crept in on him—*was* this guilt? Yet even now the doubt would not be harbored by him.

"Say so—you must mean so! You deny them as yours; what can they be but forgeries? There is no other explanation. *I* think the whole matter a conspiracy to extort money; but I may be wrong—let that pass. If it be, on the contrary, an imitation of both our signatures that has been palmed off upon these usurers, it is open to other treatment. Compensated for their pecuniary loss, they can have no need to press the matter further, unless they find out the delinquent. See here!" he went to a writing-cabinet at the end of the room, flung the lid back, swept out a herd of papers, and wrenching a blank check from its book, threw it down before Baroni; "here! fill it up as you like, and I will sign it, in exchange for the forged sheet."

Baroni paused a moment. Money he loved with an adoration that excluded every other passion; that blank check, that limitless carte blanche, that vast exchequer from which to draw!—it was a sore temptation. He thought wistfully of the Welcher's peremptory forbiddance of all compromise—of the Welcher's inexorable command to "wring the fine-feathered bird," lose whatever might be lost by it.

Cecil, ere the Hebrew could speak, leant forward, took the check and tore it in two.

"God bless you, Rock," he said, so low that it only reached the Seraph's ear, "but *you* must not do that."

"Beauty, are you mad?" cried the Marquis, passionately. "If this villainous thing be a forgery, you are its victim as much as I—tenfold more than I. If this Jew choose to sell the paper to me, naming his own

compensation, whose affair is it except his and mine? They have been losers, we indemnify them. It rests with us to find out the criminal. M. Baroni, there are a hundred more checks in that book, name your price, and you shall have it; or, if you prefer my father's, I will send to him for it. His Grace will sign one without a question of its errand, if I ask him. Come! your price?"

Baroni had recovered the momentary temptation, and was strong in the austerity of virtue, in the unassailability of social duty.

"You behave most nobly, most generously by your friend, my lord," he said politely. "I am glad such friendship exists on earth. But you really ask me what is not in my power. In the first place, I am but one of the firm, and have no authority to act alone; in the second, I most certainly, *were* I alone, should decline totally any pecuniary compromise. A great criminal action is not to be hushed up by any monetary arrangement. You, my Lord Marquis, may be ignorant in the Guards of a very coarse term used in law, called 'compounding with felony.' That is to what you tempt me now."

The Seraph, with one of those oaths that made the Hebrew's blood run cold, though he was no coward, opened his lips to speak; Cecil arrested him with that singular impassiveness, that apathy of resignation which had characterized his whole conduct throughout, save at a few brief moments.

"Make no opposition. The man is acting but in his own justification. I will wait for mine. To resist would be to degrade us with a bully's brawl; they have the law with them. Let it take its course."

The Seraph dashed his hand across his eyes; he felt blind—the room seemed to reel with him.

"Oh, God! that you——"

He could not finish the words. That his comrade, his friend, one of his own corps, of his own world, should be arrested like the blackest thief in Whitechapel, or in the Rue du Temple!

Cecil glanced at him, and his eyes grew infinitely yearning—infinitely gentle; a shudder shook him all through his limbs. He hesitated a moment, then he stretched out his hand.

"Will you take it—still?"

Almost before the words were spoken, his hand was held in both of the Seraph's.

"Take it? Before all the world—always, come what will."

His eyes were dim as he spoke, and his rich voice rang clear as the ring of silver, though there was the tremor of emotion in it. He had forgotten the Hebrew's presence; he had forgotten all save his friend and his friend's extremity. Cecil did not answer; if he had done so, all the courage, all the calm, all the control that pride and breeding alike sustained in him, would have been shattered down to weakness; his hand closed fast in his companion's, his eyes met his once in a look of gratitude that pierced the heart of the other like a knife; then he turned to the Jew with a haughty serenity.

"M. Baroni, I am ready."

"Wait!" cried Rockingham. "Where you go I come."

The Hebrew interposed demurely.

"Forgive me, my lord—not now. You can take what steps you will as regards your friend later on; and you may rest assured he will be treated with all delicacy compatible with the case, but you cannot accompany him now. I rely on his word to go with me quietly, but I now regard him, and you must remember this, as not

the son of Viscount Royallieu—not the Honorable Bertie Cecil, of the Life Guards—not the friend of one so distinguished as yourself—but as simply an arrested forger."

Baroni could not deny himself that last sting of his vengeance, yet, as he saw the faces of the men on whom he flung the insult, he felt for the moment that he might pay for his temerity with his life. He put his hand above his eyes with a quick involuntary movement, like a man who wards off a blow.

"Gentlemen," and his teeth chattered as he spoke, "one sign of violence, and I shall summon legal force."

Cecil caught the Seraph's lifted arm, and stayed it in its vengeance. His own teeth were clinched tight as a vice, and over the haggard whiteness of his face a deep red flush had come.

"We degrade ourselves by resistance. Let me go—they must do what they will. My reckoning must wait, and my justification. One word only: take the King, and keep him for my sake."

Another moment and the door had closed; he was gone out to his fate, and the Seraph, with no eyes on him, bowed down his head upon his arms where he leaned against the marble table, and, for the first time in all his life, felt the hot tears roll down his face like rain, as the passion of a woman mastered and unmanned him;—he would sooner a thousand times have laid his friend down in his grave than have seen him live for this.

Cecil went slowly out beside his accuser. The keen, bright eyes of the Jew kept vigilant watch and ward on him; a single sign of any effort to evade him would have been arrested by him in an instant with preconcerted skill. He looked, and saw that no thought of escape was in his prisoner's mind. Cecil had sur-

rendered himself, and he went to his doom; he laid no blame on Baroni, and he scarce gave him a remembrance. The Hebrew did not stand to him in the colors he wore to Rockingham, who beheld this thing but on its surface: Baroni was to him only the agent of an inevitable shame, of a helpless fate that closed him in, netting him tight with the web of his own past actions; no more than the irresponsible executioner of what was in the Jew's sight and in knowledge a just sentence. He condemned his accuser in nothing; no more than the conscience of a guilty man can condemn the discoverers and the instruments of his chastisement.

Was he guilty?

Any judge might have said that he knew himself to be so as he passed down the staircase and outward to the entrance with that dead resignation on his face, that brooding, rigid look set on his features, and gazing almost in stupefaction out from the dark hazel depths of eyes that women had loved for their lustre, their languor, and the softness of their smile.

They walked out into the evening air unnoticed: he had given his consent to follow the bill-discounter without resistance, and he had no thought to break his word; he had submitted himself to the inevitable course of this fate that had fallen on him, and the whole tone of his temper and his breeding lent him the quiescence, though he had none of the doctrine of a supreme fatalist. There were carriages standing before the hotel, waiting for those who were going to the ball-room, to the theatre, to an archduke's dinner, to a princess's entertainment; he looked at them with a vague, strange sense of unreality—these things of the life from which he was now barred out for ever. The sparkling tide of existence in Baden was flowing on its way, and he went out an ac-

cused felon, branded, and outlawed, and dishonored from all place in the world that he had led, and been caressed by, and beguiled with for so long.

To-night, at this hour, he should have been among all that was highest and gayest and fairest in Europe at the banquet of a Prince—and he went by his captor's side a convicted criminal.

Once out in the air, the Hebrew laid his hand on his arm: he started—it was the first sign that his *liberty was gone!* He restrained himself from all resistance still, and passed onward, down where Baroni motioned him out of the noise of the carriages, out of the glare of the light, into the narrow, darkened turning of a side street. He went passively; for this man trusted to his honor.

In the gloom stood three figures, looming indistinctly in the shadow of the houses; one was a Huissier of the Staats-Procurator, beside whom stood the Commissary of Police of the district; the third was an English detective. Ere he saw them, their hands were on his shoulders, and the cold chill of steel touched his wrists. The Hebrew had betrayed him, and arrested him in the open street. In an instant, as the ring of the rifle rouses the slumbering tiger, all the life and the soul that were in him rose in revolt as the icy glide of the handcuffs sought their hold on his arms. In an instant, all the wild blood of his race, all the pride of his breeding, all the honor of his service, flashed into fire and leapt into action. Trusted, he would have been true to his accuser; deceived, the chains of his promise were loosened, and all he thought, all he felt, all he knew were the lion impulses, the knightly instincts, the resolute choice to lose life rather than to lose freedom, of a soldier and a gentleman. All he remembered was that he would fight to the death rather than be taken alive; that they should kill him where

he stood, in the starlight, rather than lead him in the sight of men as a felon.

With the strength that laid beneath all the gentle languor of his habits and with the science of the Eton Playing Fields of his boyhood, he wrenched his wrists free ere the steel had closed, and with the single straightening of his left arm felled the detective to earth like a bullock, with a crashing blow that sounded through the stillness like some heavy timber stove in; flinging himself like lightning on the Huissier, he twisted out of his grasp the metal weight of the handcuffs, and wrestling with him was woven for a second in that close-knit struggle which is only seen when the wrestlers wrestle for life and death. The German was a powerful and firmly built man, but Cecil's science was the finer and the more masterly. His long, slender, delicate limbs seemed to twine and writhe around the massive form of his antagonist like the coils of a cobra; they rocked and swayed to and fro on the stones, while the shrill, shrieking voice of Baroni filled the night with its clamor. The vice-like pressure of the stalwart arms of his opponent crushed him in till his ribs seemed to bend and break under the breathless oppression, the iron force; but desperation nerved him, the Royallieu blood, that never took defeat, was roused now, for the first time in his careless life; his skill and his nerve were unrivalled, and with a last effort he dashed the Huissier off him, and lifting him up—he never knew how—as he would have lifted a log of wood, hurled him down in the white streak of moonlight that alone slanted through the peaked roofs of the crooked by-street.

The cries of Baroni had already been heard; a crowd drawn by their shrieking appeals were bearing toward the place in tumult. The Jew had the quick wit to give

them, as call-word, that it was a croupier who had been found cheating and fled; it sufficed to inflame the whole mob against the fugitive. Cecil looked round him once —such a glance as a Royal gives when the gaze-hounds are panting about him, and the fangs are in his throat; then with the swiftness of the deer itself he dashed downward into the gloom of the winding passage at the speed which had carried him, in many a foot-race, victor in the old green Eton meadows. There was scarce a man in the Queen's Service who could rival him for lightness of limb, for power of endurance in every sport of field and fell, of the moor and the gymnasium; and the athletic pleasures of many a happy hour stood him in good stead now, in the emergence of his terrible extremity.

Flight!—for the instant the word thrilled through him with a loathing sense. Flight!—the craven's refuge, the criminal's resource. He wished in the moment's agony that they would send a bullet through his brain as he ran, rather than drive him out to this. Flight!—he felt a coward and a felon as he fled; fled from every fairer thing, from every peaceful hour, from the friendship and goodwill of men, from the fame of his ancient race, from the smile of the women that loved him, from all that makes life rich and fair, from all that men call honor; fled, to leave his name disgraced in the service he adored; fled, to leave the world to think him a guilty dastard who dared not face his trial; fled, to bid his closest friend believe him low sunk in the depths of foulest felony, branded for ever with a criminal's shame, —by his own act, by his own hand. Flight!—it has bitter pangs that make brave men feel cowards when they fly from tyranny and danger and death, to a land of peace and promise; but in *his* flight he left behind him all that made life worth the living, and went out to

meet eternal misery, renouncing every hope, yielding up all his future.

"It is for her sake—and his," he thought: and without a moment's pause, without a backward look, he ran, as the stag runs with the bay of the pack behind it, down into the shadows of the night.

The hue and cry was after him; the tumult of a crowd's excitement, raised it knows not why or wherefore, was on his steps, joined with the steadier and keener pursuit of men organized for the hunter's work, and trained to follow the faintest track, the slightest clue. The moon was out, and they saw him clearly, though the marvellous fleetness of his stride had borne him far a-head in the few moments' start he had gained. He heard the beat of their many feet on the stones, the dull thud of their running, the loud clamor of the mob, the shrill cries of the Hebrew offering gold with frantic lavishness to whoever should stop his prey. All the breathless excitation, all the keen and desperate straining, all the tension of the neck-and-neck struggle that he had known so often over the brown autumn country of the Shires at home, he knew now, intensified to horror, made deadly with despair, changed into a race for life and death.

Yet, with it the wild blood in him woke; the recklessness of peril, the daring and defiant courage that lay beneath his levity and languor heated his veins and spurred his strength; he was ready to die if they chose to slaughter him; but for his freedom he strove as men will strive for life; to distance them, to escape them, he would have breathed his last at the goal; they might fire him down if they would, but he swore in his teeth to die *free*.

Some Germans in his path hearing the shouts that

thundered after him in the night, drew their mule-cart across the pent-up passage-way down which he turned, and blocked the narrow road. He saw it in time: a second later, and it would have been instant death to him at the pace he went; he saw it, and gathered all the force and nervous impetus in his frame to the trial as he came rushing downward along the slope of the lane, with his elbows back, and his body straight, as prize-runners run. The wagon, sideways, stretched across—a solid barrier, heaped up with fir boughs brought for firing from the forests, the mules stood abreast, yoked together. The mob following saw too, and gave a hoot and yell of brutal triumph; their prey was in their clutches; the cart barred his progress, and he must double like a fox faced with a stone wall.

Scarcely!—they did not know the man with whom they had to deal—the daring and the coolness that the languid surface of indolent fashion had covered. Even in the imminence of supreme peril, of breathless jeopardy, he measured with unerring eye the distance and the need, rose as lightly in the air as Forest King had risen with him over fence and hedge, and with a single running leap cleared the width of the mules' backs, and landing safely on the farther side, dashed on, scarcely pausing for breath. The yell that hissed in his wake, as the throng saw him escape, by what to their slow Teutonic instincts seemed a devil's miracle, was on his ear like the bay of the slot-hounds to the deer. They might kill him if they could, but they should never take him captive.

And the moon was so brightly, so pitilessly clear, shining down in the summer light, as though in love with the beauty of earth! He looked up once; the stars seemed reeling round him in disordered riot; the chill face of the moon looked unpitying as death. All this

loveliness was round him; this glory of sailing cloud and shadowy forest and tranquil planet, and there was no help for him.

A gay burst of music broke on the stillness from the distance; he had left the brilliance of the town behind him, and was now in its by-streets and outskirts. The sound seemed to thrill him to the bone; it was like the echo of the lost life he was leaving for ever.

He saw, he felt, he heard, he thought; feeling and sense were quickened in him as they had never been before, yet he never slackened his pace save once or twice, when he paused for breath; he ran as swiftly, he ran as keenly, as ever stag or fox had run before him, doubling with their skill, taking the shadow as they took the covert, noting with their rapid eye the safest track, outracing with their rapid speed the pursuit that thundered in his wake.

The by-lanes he took were deserted, and he was now well-nigh out of the town, with the open country and forest lying before him. The people whom he met rushed out of his path; happily for him they were few, and were terrified, because they thought him a madman broken loose from his keepers. He never looked back; but he could tell that the pursuit was falling farther and farther behind him; that the speed at which he went was breaking the powers of his hunters; fresh throngs added indeed to the first pursuers as they tore down through the starlit night, but none had the science with which he went, the trained, matchless skill of the university foot-race. He left them more and more behind him each second of the breathless chase, that endless as it seemed had lasted bare three minutes. If the night were but dark! He felt that pitiless luminance glistening bright about him, everywhere, shining over all the summer

world, and leaving scarce a shadow to fall athwart his way. The silver glory of the radiance was shed on every rood of ground; one hour of a winter night, one hour of the sweeping ink-black rain of an autumn storm, and he could have made for shelter as the stag makes for it across the broad brown highland water.

Before him stretched indeed the gloom of the masses of pine, the upward slopes of tree-stocked hills, the vastness of the Black Forest; but they were like the mirage to a man who dies in a desert; he knew at the pace he went he could not live to reach them. The blood was beating in his brain, and pumping from his heart; a tightness like an iron band seemed girt about his loins, his lips began to draw his breath in with loud gasping spasms; he knew that in a little space his speed must slacken—he knew it by the roar like the noise of waters that was rushing on his ear, and the oppression like a hand's hard grip that seemed above his heart.

But he would go till he died; go till they fired on him; go though the skies felt swirling round like a sea of fire, and the hard hot earth beneath his feet jarred his whole frame as his feet struck it flying.

The angle of an old wood house, with towering roof and high-peaked gables, threw a depth of shadow at last across his road; a shadow black and rayless, darker for the white glisten of the moon around. Built more in the Swiss than the German style, a massive balcony of wood ran round it, upon and beneath which in its heavy shade was an impenetrable gloom, while the twisted wooden pillars ran upward to the gallery, loggia-like. With rapid perception and intuition he divined rather than saw these things, and swinging himself up with noiseless lightness, he threw himself full length down on the rough flooring of the balcony. If they passed he was safe for a brief

time more at least; if they found him—his teeth clinched like a mastiff's where he lay—he had the strength in him still to sell his life dearly.

The pursuers came closer and closer, and by the clamors that floated up in indistinct and broken fragments, he knew that they had tracked him. He heard the tramp of their feet as they came under the loggia; he heard the click of the pistols—they were close upon him at last in the blackness of night.

CHAPTER XII.

The King's last Service.

"Is he up there?" asked a voice in the darkness.

"Not likely. A cat couldn't scramble up that woodwork," answered a second.

"Send a shot, and try," suggested a third.

There he lay, stretched motionless on the flat roof of the verandah. He heard the words as the thronging mob surged, and trampled, and swore, and quarrelled, beneath him, in the blackness of the gloom, balked of their prey and savage for some amends. There was a moment's pause, a hurried, eager consultation; then he heard the well-known sound of a charge being rammed down, and the sharp drawing out of a ramrod; there was a flash, a report, a line of light flamed a second in his sight, a ball hissed past him with a loud, singing rush, and bedded itself in the timber a few inches above his uncovered hair. A dead silence followed; then the muttering of many voices broke out afresh.

"He's not there, at any rate," said one, who seemed the chief; "he couldn't have kept as still as that with a shot so near him. He's made for the open country and the forest, I'll take my oath."

Then the treading of many feet trampled their way out from beneath the loggia; their voices and their rapid steps grew fainter and fainter as they hurried away through the night. For awhile, at least, he was safe.

For some moments he lay prostrated there; the rushing of the blood on his brain, the beating of his heart, the panting of his breath, the quivering of his limbs after the intense muscular effort he had gone through, mastered him, and flung him down there beaten and powerless. He felt the foam on his lips, and he thought with every instant that the surcharged veins would burst; hands of steel seemed to crush in upon his chest, knotted cords to tighten in excruciating pain about his loins; he breathed in short convulsive gasps; his eyes were blind, and his head swam. A dreaming fancy that this was death vaguely came on him, and he was glad it should be so.

His eyelids closed unconsciously, weighed down as by the weight of lead; he saw the starry skies above him no more, and the distant noise of the pursuit waxed duller and duller on his ear; then he lost all sense and memory—he ceased even to feel the night air on his face. How long he lay there he never knew, when consciousness returned to him all was still; the moon was shining down clear as the day, the west wind was blowing softly among his hair. He staggered to his feet and leaned against the timber of the upper wall; the shelving, impenetrable darkness sloped below; above were the glories of a summer sky at midnight, around him the hills and woods were bathed in the silver light; he looked, and he remembered all.

He had escaped his captors; but for how long? While yet there were some hours of the night left, he must find some surer refuge, or fall into their hands again. Yet it was strange that in this moment his own misery and his

own peril were less upon him than a longing to see once more—and for the last time—the woman for whose sake he suffered this. Their love had had the lightness and the languor of their world, and had had but little depth in it; yet in that hour of his supreme sacrifice to her he loved her as he had not loved in his life.

Recklessness had always been latent in him, with all his serenity and impassiveness; a reckless resolve entered him now—reckless to madness. Lightly and cautiously, though his sinews still ached, and his nerves still throbbed with the past strain, he let himself fall, hand over hand, as men go down a rope, along the woodwork to the ground. Once touching earth, off he glided, swiftly and noiselessly, keeping in the shadow of the walls all the length of the streets he took, and shunning every place where any sort of tumult could suggest the neighborhood of those who were out and hunting him down. As it chanced, they had taken to the open country; he passed on unquestioned, and wound his way to the Kursaal. He remembered that to-night there was a masked ball, at which all the princely and titled world of Baden were present; to which he would himself have gone after the Russian dinner; by the look of the stars he saw that it must be midnight or past, the ball would be now at its height.

The dare-devil wildness, and the cool quietude that were so intimately and intricately mingled in his nature could alone have prompted and projected such a thought and such an action as suggested themselves to him now; in the moment of his direst extremity, of his utter hopelessness, of his most imminent peril, he went—to take a last look at his mistress! Baden, for aught he knew, might be but one vast network to mesh in and to capture him; yet he ran the risk with the dauntless temerity that had

ever laid underneath the indifferentism and the indolence of his habits.

Keeping always in the shadow, and moving slowly, so as to attract no notice from those he passed, he made his way deliberately, straight towards the blaze of light where all the gaiety of the town was centred; he reckoned, and rightly, as it proved, that the rumor of his story, the noise of his pursuit, would not have penetrated here as yet; his own world would be still in ignorance. A moment, that was all he wanted, just to look upon a woman's beauty; he went forward daringly and tranquilly to its venture. If any had told him that a vein of romance was in him, he would have stared and thought them madmen; yet something almost as wild was in his instinct now. He had lost so much to keep her honor from attainder; he wished to meet the gaze of her fair eyes once more before he went out to his exile.

In one of the string of waiting carriages he saw a loose domino lying on the seat; he knew the liveries and the footmen, and he signed them to open the door. "Tell Count Carl I have borrowed these," he said to the servant, as he sprang into the vehicle, slipped the scarlet and black domino on, took the mask, and left the carriage. The man touched his hat and said nothing; he knew Cecil well, as an intimate friend of his young Austrian master. In that masquerade guise he was safe, for the few minutes, at least, which were all he dared take.

He went on, mingling among the glittering throng, and pierced his way to the ball-room, the Venetian mask covering his features; many spoke to him, by the scarlet and black colors they took him for the Austrian; he answered none, and threaded his way among the blaze of hues, the joyous echoes of the music, the flutter of the

silk and satin dominoes, the mischievous challenge of whispers. His eyes sought only one; he soon saw her, in the white and silver mask-dress, with the spray of carmine-hued eastern flowers, by which he had been told days ago to recognise her. A crowd of dominoes were about her, some masked, some not. Her eyes glanced through the envious disguise, and her lips were laughing. He approached her with all his old tact in the art *d'arborer le cotillon;* not hurriedly, so as to attract notice, but carefully, so as to glide into a place near her.

"You promised me this waltz," he said very gently in her ear. "I have come in time for it."

She recognised him by his voice, and turned from a French prince to rebuke him for his truancy, with gay raillery and mock anger.

"Forgive me, and let me have this one waltz—please do!" She glanced at him a moment, and let him lead her out.

"No one has my step as you have it, Bertie," she murmured, as they glided into the measure of the dance.

She thought his glance fell sadly on her as he smiled.

"No?—but others will soon learn it."

Yet he had never threaded more deftly the maze of the waltzers, never trodden more softly, more swiftly, or with more science, the polished floor. The waltz was perfect; she did not know it was also a farewell. The delicate perfume of her floating dress, the gleam of the scarlet flower-spray, the flash of the diamonds studding her domino, the fragrance of her lips as they breathed so near his own; they haunted him many a long year afterward.

His voice was very calm, his smile was very gentle, his step, as he swung easily through the intricacies of the circle, was none the less smooth and sure for the race

that had so late strained his sinews to bursting; the woman he loved saw no change in him; but as the waltz drew to its end, she felt his heart beat louder and quicker on her own, she felt his hand hold her own more closely, she felt his head drooped over her till his lips almost touched her brow;—it was his last embrace; no other could be given here, in the multitude of these courtly crowds. Then, with a few low-murmured words that thrilled her in their utterance, and echoed in her memory for years to come, he resigned her to the Austrian Grand Duke, who was her next claimant, and left her silently—for ever.

Less heroism has often proclaimed itself, with blatant trumpet to the world—a martyrdom.

He looked back once as he passed from the ball-room—back to the sea of colors, to the glitter of light, to the moving hues, amid which the sound of the laughing intoxicating music seemed to float; to the glisten of the jewels, and the gold, and the silver, to the scene, in a word, of the life that would be his no more. He looked back in a long, lingering look, such as a man may give the gladness of the earth before the gates of a prison close on him; then he went out once more into the night, threw the domino and the mask back again into the carriage, and took his way, alone.

He passed along till he had gained the shadow of a by-street, by a sheer unconscious instinct; then he paused, and looked round him—what could he do? He wondered vaguely if he were not dreaming; the air seemed to reel about him, and the earth to rock; the very force of control he had sustained made the reaction stronger; he began to feel blind and stupefied. How could he escape? The railway station would be guarded by those on the watch for him; he had but a few pounds in his pocket,

hastily slipped in as he had won them, "money-down," at *écarté* that day; all avenues of escape were closed to him, and he knew that his limbs would refuse to carry him with any kind of speed farther. He had only the short, precious hours remaining of the night in which to make good his flight—and flight he must take to save those for whom he had elected to sacrifice his life. Yet how? and where?

A hurried, noiseless footfall came after him; Rake's voice came breathless on his ear, while the man's hand went up in the unforgotten soldier's salute—

"Sir! no words. Follow me, and I'll save you."

The one well-known voice was to him like water in a desert land; he would have trusted the speaker's fidelity with his life. He asked nothing, said nothing, but followed rapidly and in silence, turning and doubling down a score of crooked passages, and burrowing at the last like a mole in a still, deserted place on the outskirts of the town, where some close-set trees grew at the back of stables and out-buildings.

In a streak of the white moonlight stood two hunters, saddled; one was Forest King. With a cry, Cecil threw his arms round the animal's neck; he had no thought then except that he and the horse must part.

"Into saddle, sir! quick as your life!" whispered Rake. "We'll be far away from this d—d den by morning."

Cecil looked at him like a man in stupor—his arm still over the gray's neck.

"He can have no stay in him? He was dead-beat on the course."

"I know he was, sir; but he ain't now; he was pisined; but I've a trick with a 'oss that'll set that sort o' thing—if it ain't gone too far, that is to say—right in a

brace of shakes. I doctored him; he's hisself agen; he'll take you till he drops."

The King thrust his noble head closer in his master's bosom, and made a little murmuring noise, as though he said, "Try me!"

"God bless you, Rake!" Cecil said, huskily. "But I cannot take him; he will starve with me. And—how did you know of this?"

"Beggin' your pardon, your honor, he'll eat chopped furze with you better than he'll eat oats and hay along of a new master," returned Rake, rapidly, tightening the girths. "I don't know nothin', sir, save that I heard you was in a strait; I don't *want* to know nothin'; but I sees them cursed cads a runnin' of you to earth, and thinks I to myself, 'Come what will, the King will be the ticket for him.' So I ran to your room unbeknown, packed a little valise, and got out the passports, then back again to the stables, and saddled him like lightnin', and got 'em off, nobody knowing but Bill there. I seed you go by into the Kursaal, and laid in wait for you, sir. I made bold to bring Mother o' Pearl for myself."

And Rake stopped, breathless and hoarse with passion and grief that he would not utter. He had heard more than he said.

"For yourself?" echoed Cecil. "What do you mean? My good fellow, I am ruined. I shall be beggared from to-night—utterly. I cannot even help you, or keep you; but Lord Rockingham will do both for my sake."

The *ci-devant* soldier struck his heel into the earth with a fiery oath.

"Sir, there ain't time for no words. Where you goes I go. I'll follow you while there's a drop o' blood in me. You was good to me when I was a poor devil that

every one scouted; you shall have me with you to the last, if I die for it. There!"

Cecil's voice shook as he answered. The fidelity touched him as adversity could not do.

"Rake, you are a noble fellow. I would take you, were it possible; but—in an hour I may be in a felon's prison. If I escape that, I shall lead a life of such wretchedness as——"

"That's not nothing to me, sir."

"But it is much to me," answered Cecil. "As things have turned—life is over with me, Rake. What my own fate may be I have not the faintest notion—but let it be what it will, it must be a bitter one. I will not drag another into it."

"If you send me away, I'll shoot myself through the head, sir, that's all."

"You will do nothing of the kind. Go to Lord Rockingham, and ask him from me to take you into his service. You cannot have a kinder master."

"I don't say nothing agen the Marquis, sir," said Rake, doggedly, "he's a right-on generous gentleman, but he aren't *you*. Let me go with you, if it's just to rub the King down. Lord, sir! you don't know what straits I've lived in—what a lot of things I can turn my hand to—what a one I am to fit myself into any rat-hole, and make it spicy. Why, sir, I'm that born-scamp I am—I'm a deal happier on the cross and getting my bread just any how, than I am when I'm in clover like you've kep' me."

Rake's eyes looked up wistfully and eager as a dog's when he prays to be let out of kennel to follow the gun; his voice was husky and agitated with a strong excitement. Cecil stood a moment, irresolute, touched and

pained at the man's spaniel-like affection—yet not yielding to it.

"I thank you from my heart, Rake," he said at length, "but it must not be. I tell you my future life will be beggary——"

"You'll want me anyways, sir," retorted Rake, ashamed of the choking in his throat. "I ask your pardon for interruptin', but every second's that precious like Besides, sir, I've got to cut and run for my own sake. I've laid Willon's head open down there in the loose box; and when he's come to himself a pretty hue and cry he'll raise after me. He painted the King, that's what he did; and I told him so, and I gev' it to him—one—two—amazin'! Get into saddle, sir, for the Lord's sake! and here, Bill—you run back, shut the door, and don't let nobody know the 'osses are out till the mornin'. Then look like a muff as you are, and say nothin'!"

The stable-boy stared, nodded assent, and sloped off. Rake threw himself across the brown mare.

"Now, sir! a steeple-chase for our lives! We'll be leagues away by the day-dawn, and I've got their feed in the saddle-bags, so that they'll bait in the forests. Off, sir, for God's sake, or the blackguards will be down on you again!"

As he spoke the clamor and tread of men of the town racing to the chase, were wafted to them on the night wind, drawing nearer and nearer; Rake drew the reins tight in his hand in fury.

"There they come—the d—d beaks! For the love of mercy, sir, don't check *now*. Ten seconds more and they'll be on you; off, off!—or by the Lord Harry, sir, you'll make a murderer of me, and I'll kill the first man that lays his hand on you!"

The blaze of bitter blood was in the ex-Dragoon's

fiery face as the moon shone on it, and he drew out one of his holster pistols, and swung round in his saddle facing the narrow entrance of the lane, ready to shoot down the first of the pursuit whose shadow should darken the broad stream of white light that fell through the archway.

Cecil looked at him, and paused no more; but vaulted into the old familiar seat, and Forest King bore him away through the starry night, with the brown mare racing her best by his side. Away—through the sleeping shadows, through the broad beams of the moon, through the odorous scent of the crowded pines, through the soft breaking gray of the dawn; away—to mountain solitudes and forest silence, and the shelter of lonely untracked ravines, and the woodland lairs they must share with wolf and boar; away—to flee with the flight of the hunted fox, to race with the wakeful dread of the deer; away—to what fate, who could tell?

Far and fast they rode through the night, never drawing rein. The horses laid well to their work, their youth and their mettle were roused, and they needed no touch of spur, but neck and neck dashed down through the sullen gray of the dawn and the breaking flush of the first sunrise. On the hard parched earth, on the dew-laden moss, on the stretches of wayside sward, on the dry white dust of the ducal roads, their hoofs thundered, unfollowed, unechoed, the challenge of no pursuit stayed them, and they obeyed the call that was made on their strength with good and gallant willingness. Far and fast they rode, happily knowing the country well; now through the darkness of night, now through the glimmering daybreak. Tall walls of fir-crowned rocks passed by them like a dream; beetling cliffs and summer foliage swept past their eyes all fused and dim; gray piles of

monastic buildings with the dull chimes tolling the hour, flashed on their sight to be lost in a moment; corn-lands yellowing for the sickle, fields with the sheaves set-up, orchards ruddy with fruit, and black barn-roofs lost in leafy nests, villages lying among their hills like German toys caught in the hollow of a guarding hand, masses of forests stretching wide, sombre and silent and dark as a tomb; the shine of water's silvery line where it flowed in a rocky channel—they passed them all in the soft gray of the waning night, in the white veil of the fragrant mists, in the stillness of sleep and of peace. Passed them, racing for more than life, flying with the speed of the wind.

"I failed him to-day through my foes and his," Forest King thought, as he laid his length out in his mighty stride. "But I love him well; I will save him to-night." And save him the brave brute did. The grass was so sweet and so short, he longed to stop for a mouthful; the brooks looked so clear and so brown, he longed to pause for a drink; renewed force and reviving youth filled his loyal veins with their fire; he could have thrown himself down on that mossy turf, and had a roll in its thyme and its lichens for sheer joy that his strength had come back. But he would yield to none of these longings; he held on for his master's sake, and tried to think, as he ran, that this was only a piece of play—only a steeple-chase, for a silver vase and a lady's smile, such as he and his rider had so often run for, and so often won, in those glad hours of the crisp winter noons of English Shires far away. He turned his eyes on the brown mare's and she turned hers on his; they were good friends in the stables at home, and they understood one another now. "If I were what I was yesterday, she wouldn't run even with *me*," thought the King; but they were doing

good work together, and he was too true a knight and too true a gentleman to be jealous of Mother o' Pearl, so they raced neck and neck through the dawn; with the noisy clatter of water-mill wheels, or the distant sound of a woodman's axe, or the tolling bell of a convent clock, the only sound on the air save the beat of the flying hoofs.

Away they went, mile on mile, league on league, till the stars faded out in the blaze of the sun, and the tall pines rose out of the gloom. Either his pursuers were baffled and distanced, or no hue and cry was yet after him; nothing arrested them as they swept on, and the silent land lay in the stillness of morning ere toil and activity awakened. It was strangely still, strangely lonely, and the echo of the gallop seemed to beat on the stirless, breathless solitude. As the light broke and grew clearer and clearer, Cecil's face in it was white as death as he galloped through the mists, a hunted man, on whose head a price was set; but it was quite calm still, and very resolute—there was no "*harking back*" in it.

They had raced nigh twenty English miles by the time the chimes of a village were striking six o'clock; it was the only group of dwellings they had ventured near in their flight; the leaded lattices were thrust open with a hasty clang, and women's heads looked out as the iron tramp of the hunters' feet struck fire from the stones. A few cries were raised; one burgher called them to know their errand; they answered nothing, but traversed the street with lightning speed, gone from sight almost ere they were seen. A league farther on was a wooded bottom, all dark and silent, with a brook murmuring through it under the leafy shade of lilies and the tangle of water-plants; there Cecil checked the King and threw himself out of saddle.

"He is not quite himself yet," he murmured, as he loosened the girths and held back the delicate head from the perilous cold of the water to which the horse stretched so eagerly; he thought more of Forest King than he thought, even in that hour, of himself. He did all that was needed with his own hands; fed him with the corn from the saddle-bags, cooled him gently, led him to drink a cautious draught from the bubbling little stream, then let him graze and rest under the shade of the aromatic pines and the deep bronze leaves of the copper beeches; it was almost dark, so heavy and thickly laced were the branches, and exquisitely tranquil in the heart of the hilly country, in the peace of the early day, with the rushing of the forest brook the sole sound that was heard, and the everlasting sighing of the pine-boughs overhead.

Cecil leaned awhile silently against one of the great gnarled trunks, and Rake affected to busy himself with the mare; in his heart was a tumult of rage, a volcano of curiosity, a pent-up storm of anxious amaze, but he would have let Mother o' Pearl brain him with a kick of her iron plates rather than press a single look that should seem like *doubt*, or seem like insult in adversity to his fallen master.

Cecil's eyes, drooped and brooding, gazed a long half-hour down in silence into the brook bubbling at his feet; then he lifted his head and spoke—with a certain formality and command in his voice, as though he gave an order on parade.

"Rake, listen, and do precisely what I bid you, neither more nor less. The horses cannot accompany me, nor you either; I must go henceforth where they would starve, and you would do worse. I do not take the King into suffering, nor you into temptation."

Rake, who at the tone had fallen unconsciously into

the attitude of "attention," giving the salute with his old military instinct, opened his lips to speak in eager protestation; Cecil put up his hand.

"I have decided; nothing you can say will alter me. We are near a by-station now; if I find none there to prevent me, I shall get away by the first train; to hide in these woods is out of the question. You will return by easy stages to Baden, and take the horses at once to Lord Rockingham. They are his now. Tell him my last wish was that he should take you into his service; and he will be a better master to you than I have ever been. As for the King——" his lips quivered, and his voice shook a little despite himself, "he will be safe with him. I shall go into some foreign service—Austrian, Russian, Mexican, whichever be open to me. I would not risk such a horse as mine to be sold, ill treated, tossed from owner to owner, sent in his old age to a knacker's yard, or killed in a skirmish by a cannon-shot. Take both him and the mare back, and go back yourself. Believe me, I thank you from my heart for your noble offer of fidelity, but accept it I never shall."

A dead pause came after his words; Rake stood mute; a curious look, half dogged, half wounded, but very resolute, had come on his face. Cecil thought him pained, and spoke with an infinite gentleness:

"My good fellow, do not regret it, or fancy I have no gratitude to you. I feel your loyalty deeply, and I know all you would willingly suffer for me; but it must not be. The mere offer of what you would do has been quite testimony enough of your truth and your worth. It is impossible for me to tell you what has so suddenly changed my fortunes; it is sufficient that for the future I shall be, if I live, what you were—a private soldier in an army that needs a sword. But let my fate be what it

will, I go to it *alone*. Spare me more speech, and simply obey my last command."

Quiet as the words were, there was a resolve in them not to be disputed, an authority not to be rebelled against. Rake stared, and looked at him blankly; in this man who spoke to him with so subdued but so irresistible a power of command, he could scarcely recognise the gay, indolent, indulgent, *pococurante* Guardsman, whose most serious anxiety had been the set of a lace tie, the fashion of his hunting dress, or the choice of the gold arabesques for his smoking-slippers.

Rake was silent a moment, then his hand touched his cap again.

"Very well, sir," and without opposition or entreaty, he turned to resaddle the mare.

Our natures are oddly inconsistent. Cecil would not have taken the man into exile, and danger, and temptation, and away from comfort and an honest life, for any consideration; yet it gave him something of a pang that Rake was so soon dissuaded from following him, and so easily convinced of the folly of his fidelity. But he had dealt himself a far deadlier one when he had resolved to part for ever from the King. He loved the horse better than he loved anything,—fed from his hand in foalhood, reared, broken, and trained under his own eye and his own care, he had had a truer welcome from those loving, lustrous eyes, than all his mistresses ever gave him. He had had so many victories, so many hunting-runs, so many pleasant days of winter and of autumn, with Forest King for his comrade and companion! He could better bear to sever from all other things than from the stable-monarch, whose brave heart never failed him, and whose honest love was always his.

He stretched his hand out with his accustomed signal,

the King lifted his head where he grazed, and came to him with the murmuring noise of pleasure he always gave at his master's caress, and pressed his forehead against Cecil's breast, and took such tender heed, such earnest solicitude, not to harm him with a touch of the mighty fore hoofs, as those only who care for and know horses well will understand in its relation.

Cecil threw his arm over his neck, and leant his own head down on it, so that his face was hidden. He stood motionless so many moments, and the King never stirred, but only pressed closer and closer against his bosom, as though he knew that this was his eternal farewell to his master. But little light came there, the boughs grew so thickly; and it was still and solitary as a desert in the gloom of the meeting trees.

There have been many idols, idols of gold, idols of clay, less pure, less true than the brave and loyal-hearted beast from whom he parted now.

He stood motionless a while longer, and where his face was hidden, the gray silken mane of the horse was wet with great slow tears that forced themselves through his closed eyes; then he laid his lips on the King's forehead, as he might have touched the brow of the woman he loved; and with a backward gesture of his hand to his servant, plunged down into the deep slope of netted boughs and scarce penetrable leafage, that swung back into their places, and shrouded him from sight with their thick unbroken screen.

"He's forgot me right and away in the King," murmured Rake, as he led Forest King away slowly and sorrowfully, while the hunter pulled and fretted to force his way to his master. "Well, it's only natural like. I've cause to care for him, and plenty on it; but he ain't no sort of reason to think about me."

That was the way the philosopher took his wound.

Alone, Cecil flung himself full length down on the turf beneath the beech woods, his arms thrown forward, his face buried in the grass, all gay with late summer forest blossoms; for the first time the whole might of the ruin that had fallen on him was understood by him; for the first time it beat him down beneath it as the over-strained tension of nerve and of self-restraint had their inevitable reaction. He knew what this thing was which he had done—he had given up his whole future.

Though he had spoken lightly to his servant of his intention to enter a foreign army, he knew himself how few the chances were that he could ever do so. It was possible that Rockingham might so exert his influence that he would be left unpursued, but unless this chanced so (and Baroni had seemed resolute to forego no part of his demands), the search for him would be in the hands of the law, and the wiles of secret police and of detectives' resources spread too far and finely over the world for him to have scarcely a hope of ultimate escape.

If he sought France, the Extradition Treaty would deliver him up; Russia—Austria—Prussia were of equal danger; he would be identified, and given up to trial. Into the Italian service he knew many a scoundrel was received unquestioned; and he might try the Western world; though he had no means to pay the passage, he might work it; he was a good sailor; yachts had been twice sunk under him, by steamers, in the Solent and the Spezzia, and his own schooner had once been fired at by mistake for a blockade runner, when he had brought to, and given them a broadside from his two shotted guns before he would signal them their error.

As these things swept disordered and aimless through his mind, he wondered if a nightmare were upon him;

he, the darling of Belgravia, the Guards' champion, the lover of Lady Guenevere, to be here outlawed and friendless, wearily racking his brains to solve whether he had seamanship enough to be taken before the mast, or could stand before the tambour-major of a French regiment, with a chance to serve the same flag!

For awhile he lay there like a drunken man, heavy and motionless, his brow resting on his arm, his face buried in the grass; he had parted more easily with the woman he loved than he had parted with Forest King. The chimes of some far-off monastery, or castle campanile, swung lazily in the morning stillness; the sound revived him, and recalled to him how little time there was if he would seek the flight that had begun on impulse and was continued in a firm unshrinking resolve: he must go on, and on, and on; he must burrow like a fox, hide like a beaten cur; he must put leagues between him and all who had ever known him; he must sink his very name, and identity, and existence, under some impenetrable obscurity, or the burden he had taken up for others' sake would be uselessly borne. There must be action of some sort or other, instant and unerring.

"It don't matter," he thought, with the old idle indifference, oddly becoming in that extreme moment the very height of stoic philosophy, without any thought or effort to be such; "I was going to the bad of my own accord; I must have cut and run for the debts, if not for this; it would have been the same thing, anyway, so it's just as well to do it for *them*. Life's over, and I'm a fool that I don't shoot myself."

But there was too imperious a spirit in the Royallieu blood to let him give in to disaster, and do this. He rose slowly, staggering a little, and feeling blinded and dazzled with the blaze of the morning sun as he went

out of the beech wood. There were the marks of the hoofs on the damp, dewy turf; his lips trembled a little as he saw them;—he would never ride the horse again!

Some two miles, more or less, lay between him and the railway. He was not certain of his way, and he felt a sickening exhaustion on him; he had been without food since his breakfast before the race. A gamekeeper's hut stood near the entrance of the wood; he had much recklessness in him, and no caution. He entered through the half-open door, and asked the keeper, who was eating his sausage and drinking his Lager, for a meal.

"I'll give you one if you'll bring me down that hen-harrier," growled the man in south German, pointing to the bird that was sailing far off, a mere speck in the sunny sky.

Cecil took the rifle held out to him, and without seeming even to pause to take aim, fired. The bird dropped like a stone through the air into the distant woods. There was no tremor in his wrist, no uncertainty in his measure. The keeper stared; the shot was one he had thought beyond any man's range, and he set food and drink before his guest with a crestfallen surprise, oddly mingled with veneration.

"You might have let me buy my breakfast, without making me do murder," said Bertie, quietly, as he tried to eat. The meal was coarse—he could scarcely touch it, but he drank the beer down thirstily, and took a crust of bread. He slipped his ring, a great sapphire graven with his crest, off his finger, and held it out to the man.

"That is worth fifty double-Fredericks; will you take it in exchange for your rifle and some powder and ball?"

The German stared again, open mouthed, and clinched the bargain eagerly. He did not know anything about

gems, but the splendor of this dazzled his eye, while he had guns more than enough, and could get many others at his lord's cost. Cecil fastened a shot-belt round him, took a powder-flask and cartridge-case, and with a few words of thanks, went on his way.

Now that he held the rifle in his hand, he felt ready for the work that was before him; if hunted to bay, at any rate he could now have a struggle for his liberty. The keeper stood bewildered, gazing blankly after him down the vista of pines.

"Hein! hein!" he growled, as he looked at the sapphire sparkling in his broad brown palm; "I never saw such a with-lavishness-wasteful-and-with-courteous-speech-laconic gentleman! I wish I had not let him have the gun; he will take his own life, belike; ach, Gott! he will take his own life!"

But Cecil had not bought it for that end—though he had called himself a fool for not sending a bullet through his brain, to quench in eternal darkness this ruined and wretched life that alone remained to him. He walked on through the still summer dawn, with the width of the country stretching sun-steeped around him. The sleeplessness, the excitement, the misery, the wild running of the past night had left him strengthless and racked with pain, but he knew that he must press onward or be caught, sooner or later, like netted game in the poacher's silken mesh. Where to go, what to do, he knew no more than if he were a child; everything had always been ready to his hand, the only thought required of him had been how to amuse himself and avoid being bored; now thrown alone on a mighty calamity, and brought face to face with the severity and emergency of exertion, he was like a pleasure-boat beaten under high billows, and driven far out to sea by the madness of a raging nor'-wester. He

had no conception what to do; he had but one resolve —to keep his secret; if to do it he killed himself with the rifle his sapphire ring had bought.

Carelessly daring always, he sauntered now into the station for which he had made, without a sign on him that could attract observation; he wore still the violet velvet Spanish-like dress, the hessians, and the broad-leafed felt hat with an eagle's feather fastened in it, that he had worn at the races, and with the gun in his hand there was nothing to distinguish him from any tourist "milor," except that in one hand he carried his own valise. He cast a rapid glance around; no warrant for his apprehension, no announcement of his personal appearance had preceded him here; he was safe—safe in that; safer still in the fact that the train rushed in so immediately on his arrival there, that the few people about had no time to notice or speculate upon him. The coupé was empty, by a happy chance; he took it, throwing his money down with no heed that when the little he had left was once expended he would be penniless, and the train whirled on with him, plunging into the heart of forest and mountain, and the black gloom of tunnels, and the golden seas of corn-harvest. He was alone; and he leant his head on his hands, and thought, and thought, and thought, till the rocking, and the rushing, and the whirl, and the noise of the steam on his ear and the giddy gyrations of his brain in the exhaustion of over-strung exertion, conquered thought. With the beating of the engine seeming to throb like the great swinging of a pendulum through his mind, and the whirling of the country passing by him like a confused phantasmagoria, his eyes closed, his aching limbs stretched themselves out to rest, a heavy dreamless sleep fell on him, the sleep of intense bodily fatigue, and he knew no more.

Gendarmes awoke him to see his *visa*. He showed it them by sheer mechanical instinct, and slept again in that dead weight of slumber the moment he was alone. When he had taken his ticket and they had asked him to where it should be, he had answered to their amaze, "to the farthest place it goes," and he was borne on now unwitting where it went; through the rich champaign and the barren plains, through the reddening vintage, and over the dreary plateaux; through antique cities, and across broad flowing rivers; through the cave of riven rocks, and above nestling, leafy valleys; on and on, on and on, while he knew nothing, as the opium-like sleep of intense weariness held him in its stupor.

He awoke at last with a start; it was evening; the stilly twilight was settling over all the land, and the train was still rushing onward, fleet as the wind. His eyes, as they opened dreamily and blindly, fell on a face half obscured in the gloaming; he leaned forward bewildered and doubting his senses.

"Rake!"

Rake gave the salute hurriedly and in embarrassment.

"It's I, sir!—yes, sir."

Cecil thought himself dreaming still.

"You! You had my orders?"

"Yes, sir, I had your orders," murmured the ex-soldier, more confused than he had ever been in the whole course of his audacious life, "and they was the first I ever disobeyed—they was. You see, sir, they was just what I *couldn't* swallow nohow—that's the real right down fact! Send me to the devil, Mr. Cecil, for you, and I'll go at the first biddin', but leave you just when things are on the cross for you, damn *me* if I will!—beggin' your pardon, sir!"

And Rake, growing fiery and eloquent, dashed his

cap down on the floor of the coupé with an emphatic declaration of resistance. Cecil looked at him in silence; he was not certain still whether this were not a fantastic folly he was dreaming.

"Damn *me* if I will, Mr. Cecil! You won't keep me —very well; but you can't prevent me follerin' of you, and foller you I will; and so there's no more to be said about it, sir, but just to let me have my own lark as one may say. You said you'd go to the station, I went there; you took your ticket, I took my ticket. I've been travelling behind you till about two hours ago, then I looked at you, you was asleep, sir. 'I don't think my master's quite well,' says I to Guard, 'I'd like to get in there along of him.' 'Get in with you, then,' says he (only we was jabbering that willainous tongue o' theirs), for he sees the name on my traps is the same as that on your traps—and in I get. Now, Mr. Cecil, let me say one word for all, and don't think I'm a insolent ne'er-do-well for having been and gone and disobeyed you; but you was good to me when I was sore in want of it; you was even good to my dog—rest his soul, the poor beast! there never were a braver!—and stick to you I *will*, till you kick me away like a cur. The truth is, it's only being near of you, sir, that keeps me straight; if I was to leave you I should become a bad 'un again, right and away. Don't send me from you, sir, as you took mercy on me once!"

Rake's voice shook a little toward the close of his harangue, and in the shadows of evening light, as the train plunged through the gathering gloom, his ruddy bright bronzed face looked very pale and wistful.

Cecil stretched out his hand to him in silence that spoke better than words.

Rake hung his head.

"No, sir; you're a gentleman, and I've been an awful scamp! It's enough honor for me that you *would* do it. When I'm more worth it, p'raps—but that won't never be."

"You are worth it now, my gallant fellow." His voice was very low; the man's loyalty touched him keenly. "It was only for yourself, Rake, that I ever wished you to leave me."

"God bless you, sir," said Rake, passionately, "them words are better nor ten tosses of brandy! You see, sir, I'm so spry and happy in a wild life, I am, and if so be as you go to them American parts as you spoke on, why I know 'em just as well as I know Newmarket Heath, every bit! They're terrible rips in them parts, kill you as soon as look at you; it makes things uncommon larky out there, uncommon spicy. You arn't never sure but what there's a bowie-knife a waiting for you."

With which view of the delights of Western life, Rake "feeling like a fool," as he thought to himself, for which reason he had diverged into Argentine memories, applied himself to the touching and examining of the rifle with that tenderness which only gunnery love and lore produce.

Cecil sat silent awhile, his head drooped down on his hands, while the evening deepened to-night. At last he looked up.

"The King? Where is he?"

Rake blushed shamefacedly under his tanned skin.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, behind you."

"Behind me?"

"Yes, sir; him and the brown mare. I couldn't do not nothin' else with 'em, you see, sir, so I shipped him along with us; they don't care for the train a bit, bless their hearts, and I've got a sharp boy a minding of 'em. You can easily send 'em on to England from Paris if

you're determined to part with 'em, but you know the King always was fond of drums and trumpets and that like. You remember, sir, when he was a colt we broke him into it and taught him a bit of manœuvring, 'cause till you found what pace he had in him, you'd thought of makin' a charger of him. He loves the noise of soldiering—he do; and if he thought you was goin' away without him, he'd break his heart, Mr. Cecil, sir. It was all I could do to keep him from follerin' of you this morning, he sawed my arms off a'most."

With which, Rake, conscious that he had been guilty of unpardonable disobedience and outrageous interference, hung his head over the gun, a little anxious and a good deal ashamed.

Cecil smiled a little despite himself.

"Rake, you will do for no service, I am afraid; you are terribly insubordinate!"

He had not the heart to say more; the man's fidelity was too true to be returned with rebuke; and stronger than all surprise and annoyance was a strange mingling of pain and pleasure in him to think that the horse he loved so well was still so near him, the comrade of his adversity as he had been the companion of his happiest hours.

"These things will keep him a few days," he thought, as he looked at his hunting-watch, and the priceless pearl in each of his wristband-studs. He would have pawned every atom he had about him to have had the King with him a week longer.

The night fell, the stars came out, the storm-rack of a coming tempest drifted over the sky, the train rushed onward through the thickening darkness, through the spectral country—it was like his life, rushing headlong down into impenetrable gloom. The best, the uttermost,

that he could look for was a soldier's grave, far away under some foreign soil.

* * * * * *

A few evenings later the Countess Guenevere stood alone in her own boudoir in her Baden suite; she was going to dine with an Archduchess of Russia, and the splendid jewels of her House glittered through the black shower of her laces, and crowned her beautiful glossy hair, her delicate imperial head. In her hands was a letter;—oddly written in pencil on a leaf torn out of a betting-book, but without a tremor or a change in the writing itself. And as she stood a shiver shook her frame; in the solitude of her lighted and luxurious chamber, her cheek grew pale, her eyes grew dim.

"To refute the charge," ran the last words of what was at best but a fragment, "I must have broken my promise to you, and have compromised your name. Keeping silence myself, but letting the trial take place, law-inquiries, so execrable and so minute, would soon have traced through others that I was with you that evening. To clear myself I must have attainted your name with public slander, and drawn this horrible ordeal on you before the world. Let me be *thought guilty*. It matters little. Henceforth I shall be dead to all who know me, and my ruin would have exiled me without this. Do not let an hour of grief for me mar your peace, my dearest; think of me with no pain, Beatrice, only with some memory of our past love. I have not strength yet to say—forget me; and yet,—if it be for your happiness, —blot out from your remembrance all thought of what we have been to one another; all thought of me and of my life, save to remember now and then that I was dear to you."

The words grew indistinct before her sight, they

touched the heart of the world-worn coquette, of the victorious sovereign, to the core; she trembled greatly as she read them. For,—in her hands was his fate. Though no hint of this was breathed in his farewell letter, she knew that with a word she could clear him, free him, and call him back from exile and shame, give him once more honor and guiltlessness in the sight of the world. With a word she could do this: his life was in the balance, that she held as utterly as though it were now hers to sign, or to destroy his death-warrant. It rested with her to speak, and to say he had no guilt.

But to do this she must sacrifice herself. She stood mute, irresolute, a shudder running through her till her diamonds shook in the light; the heavy tears stole slowly down one by one and fell upon the blurred and blackened paper, her heart ached with an exceeding bitterness. Then shudderingly still, and as though there were a coward crime in the action, her hand unclosed, and let the letter fall into the spirit flame of a silver lamp burning by; the words that were upon it merited a better fate, a fonder cherishing, but—they would have compromised her. She let them fall, and burn, and wither. With them she gave up his life to its burden of shame, to its fate of exile.

She would hear his crime condemned, and her lips would not open; she would hear his name aspersed, and her voice would not be raised; she would know that he dwelt in misery, or died under foreign suns unhonored and unmourned, while tongues around her would babble of his disgrace,—and she would keep her peace.

She loved him—yes; but she loved better the dignity in which the world held her, and the diamonds from which the law would divorce her if their love were known.

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She sacrificed him for her reputation and her jewels; the choice was thoroughly a woman's.

CHAPTER XIII.

In the Café of the Chasseurs.

THE red-hot light of the after-glow still burned on the waters of the bay, and shed its Egyptian-like lustre on the city that lies in the circle of the Sahel, with the Mediterranean so softly lashing with its violet waves the feet of the white sloping town. The sun had sunk down in fire—the sun that once looked over those waters on the legions of Scipio, and the iron brood of Hamilcar, and that now gave its lustre on the folds of the French flags as they floated above the shipping of the harbor, and on the glitter of the French arms, as a squadron of the army of Algeria swept back over the hills to their barracks. Pell-mell in its fantastic confusion, its incongruous blending, its forced mixture of two races, that will touch but never mingle, that will be chained together but will never assimilate, the Gallic-Moorish life of the city poured out; all the coloring of Haroun al Raschid scattered broadcast among Parisian fashion and French routine. Away, yonder on the spurs and tops of the hills, the green sea-pines seemed to pierce the transparent air; in the Cabash old dreamy Arabian legends poetic as Hafiz seem still to linger here and there under the foliage of hanging gardens or the picturesque curves of broken terraces; in the distance the brown rugged Kabyl mountains lay like a couched camel, and far off, against the golden haze a single palm rose, at a few rare intervals, with its drooped curled leaves, as though to recall amid the shame of foreign domination, that this was once the home of Hannibal, the Africa that had made Rome tremble.

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In the straight white boulevarts, as in the winding ancient streets, under the huge barn-like walls of barracks, as beneath the marvellous mosaics of mosques, the strange bizarre conflict of European and Oriental life spread its panorama. Staff-officers, all a-glitter with crosses, galloped past; mules, laden with green maize and driven by lean brown Bedouins, swept past the plate-glass windows of bonbon shops; grave white-bearded sheiks drank *petits verres* in the *guinguettes;* sapeurs, Chasseurs, Zouaves, cantinières, all the varieties of French military life, mingled with jet-black Soudans, desert kings wrathful and silent, eastern women shrouded in haick and serroual, eagle-eyed Arabs flinging back snow-white burnous, and handling ominously the jewelled hilts of their cangiars. Alcazar chansons rang out from the cafés, while in their midst stood the mosque, that had used to resound with the Muezzin; Bijou-blondine, and Bebée La-la and all the sister-heroines of demi-monde dragged their voluminous Paris-made dresses side by side with Moorish beauties, who only dared show the gleam of their bright black eyes through the yasmak; the *réverbères** were lit in the Place du Gouvernement, and a group fit for the days of Solyman the Magnificent sat under the white marble beauty of the Mohammedan church; "*Rien n'est sacré pour un sapeur!*" was being sung to a circle of *sous-officiers*,** close in the ear of a patriarch serenely majestic as Abraham; gas-lights were flashing, cigar shops were filling, newspapers were being read, the Rigolboche was being danced, *commis-voyageurs**** were chattering with grisettes, drums were beating, trumpets were sounding, bands were playing, and, amid it all, grave men were dropping on their square of carpet to pray, brass trays of

* Lamps.

** Non-commissioned officers.

*** Commercial travellers.

sweetmeats were passing, ostrich eggs were dangling, henna-tipped fingers were drawing the envious veil close, and noble oriental shadows were gliding to and fro through the open doors of the mosques, like a picture of the "Arabian Nights," like a poem of dead Islamism;—in a word, it was Algiers at evening.

In one of the cafés there, a mingling of all the nations under the sun were drinking *demi-tasses*, absinthe, vermout, or old wines, in the comparative silence that had succeeded to a song, sung by a certain favorite of the Spahis, known as Loo-Loo-j'n-m'en soucie-guère from Mlle. Loo-Loo's well-known habits of independence and bravado, which last had gone once so far as shooting a man through the chest in the Rue Bab-al-Oued, and setting all the gendarmes and sergents-de-ville at defiance afterward. Half a dozen of that famous regiment the Chasseurs d'Afrique were gathered together, some with their feet resting on the little marble-topped tables, some reading the French papers, all smoking their inseparable companions—the *brûles-gueules;**—fine stalwart sun-burnt fellows, with faces and figures that the glowing colours of their uniform set off to the best advantage.

"Loo-Loo was in fine voice to-night," said one.

"Yes, she took plenty of cognac before she sang; that always clears her voice," said a second.

"And I think that did her spirits good, shooting that Kabyl," said a third. "By-the-way, did he die?"

"N'sais pas," said the third, with a shrug of his shoulders; "Loo-Loo's a good aim."

"Sac à papier, yes! Rire-pour-tout taught her."

"Ah! There never was a shot like Rire-pour-tout. When he went out, he always asked his adversary, 'Where will you like it? your lungs, your heart, your brain? It

* Short pipes.

is quite a matter of choice;'—and whichever they chose, he shot there. Le pauvre Rire-pour-tout! he was always good-natured."

"And did he never meet his match?" asked a sous-officier of the line.

The speaker looked down on the *piou-piou** with superb contempt, and twisted his moustaches. "Monsieur! how could he? He was a Chasseur."

"But, if he never met his match, how did he die?" pursued the irreverent *piou-piou*—a little wiry man, black as a berry, agile as a monkey, tough and short as a pipe-stopper.

The magnificent Chasseur laughed in his splendid disdain. "A *piou-piou* never killed him, that I promise you. He spitted half a dozen of you before breakfast, to give him a relish. How did Rire-pour-tout die? I will tell you."

He dipped his long moustaches into a beaker of still champagne: Claude, Vicomte de Chanrellon, though in the ranks, could afford those luxuries.

"He died this way, did Rire-pour-tout! Dieu de Dieu! a very good way too. Send us all the like when our time comes! We were out yonder" (and he nodded his handsome head outward to where the brown seared plateaux and the Kabyl mountains lay). "We were hunting Arabs, of course,—pot-shooting rather, as we never got nigh enough to their main body to have a clear charge at them. Rire-pour-tout grew sick of it. 'This won't do,' he said; 'here's two weeks gone by, and I haven't shot anything but kites and jackals. I shall get my hand out.' For Rire-pour-tout, as the army knows, somehow or other, generally potted his man every day, and he missed it terribly. Well, what did he do? He

* Infantry soldier.

rode off one morning and found out the Arab camp, and he waved a white flag for a parley. He didn't dismount, but he just faced the Arabs and spoke to their Sheik. 'Things are slow,' he said to them. 'I have come for a little amusement. Set aside six of your best warriors, and I'll fight them one after another for the honor of France, and a drink of brandy to the conqueror.' They demurred; they thought it unfair to him to have six to one. 'Ah!' he laughs, 'you have heard of Rire-pour-tout, and you are afraid!' That put their blood up; they said they would fight him before all his Chasseurs. 'Come, and welcome,' said Rire-pour-tout; 'and not a hair of your beards shall be touched except by me.' So the bargain was made for an hour before sunset that night. Mort de Dieu! that was a grand duel!"

He dipped his long moustaches again into another beaker of still. Talking was thirsty work: the story was well known in all the African army, but the *piou-piou*, having served in China, was new to the soil.

"The General was ill pleased when he heard it, and half for arresting Rire-pour-tout; but—sacré!—the thing was done; our honor was involved; he had engaged to fight these men, and engaged for us to let them go in peace afterward; there was no more to be said, unless we had looked like cowards, or traitors, or both. There was a wide, level plateau in front of our camp, and the hills were at our backs—a fine field for the duello; and, true to time, the Arabs filed on to the plain, and fronted us in a long line, with their standards, and their crescents, and their cymbals and reed-pipes, and kettle-drums, all glittering and sounding. *Sac à papier!* there was a show, and we could not fight one of them! We were drawn up in line—Horse, Foot, and Artillery—Rire-pour-tout all alone, some way in advance, mounted of course. The

General and the Sheik had a conference; then the play began. There were six Arabs picked out—the flower of the army—all white and scarlet, and in their handsomest bravery, as if they came to an *aouda*. They were fine men—*diable!*—they were fine men. Now the duel was to be with swords; these had been selected; and each Arab was to come against Rire-pour-tout singly, in succession. Our drums rolled the *pas de charge*, and their cymbals clashed; they shouted '*Fantasia!*' and the first Arab rode at him. Rire-pour-tout sat like a rock, and lunge went his steel through the Bedouin's lung, before you could cry holà!—a death-stroke, of course; Rire-pour-tout always killed: that was his perfect science. Another and another and another came, just as fast as the blood flowed. You know what the Arabs are—*vous autres?* how they wheel and swerve and fight flying, and pick up their sabre from the ground, while their horse is galloping *ventre à terre*, and pierce you here and pierce you there, and circle round you like so many hawks? You know how they fought Rire-pour-tout then, one after another, more like devils than men. Mort de Dieu! it was a magnificent sight! He was gashed here and gashed there; but they could never unseat him, try how they would; and one after another he caught them sooner or later, and sent them reeling out of their saddles, till there was a great red lake of blood all round him, and five of them lay dead or dying down in the sand. He had mounted afresh twice, three horses had been killed underneath him, and his jacket all hung in strips where the steel had slashed it. It was grand to see, and did one's heart good; but—*ventre bleu!*—how one longed to go in too.

"There was only one left now—a young Arab, the Sheik's son, and down he came like the wind. He thought with the shock to unhorse Rire-pour-tout, and finish him

then at his leisure. You could hear the crash as they met like two huge cymbals smashing together. Their chargers bit and tore at each other's manes; they were twined in together there as if they were but one man and one beast; they shook and they swayed and they rocked; the sabres played about their heads so quick that it was like lightning as they flashed and twirled in the sun; the hoofs trampled up the sand till a yellow cloud hid their struggle, and out of it all you could see was the head of a horse tossing up and spouting with foam, or a sword-blade lifted to strike. Then the tawny cloud settled down a little, the sand mist cleared away, the Arab's saddle was empty, but Rire-pour-tout sat like a rock. The old Chief bowed his head. 'It is over! Allah is great!' And he knew his son lay there dead. Then we broke from the ranks, and we rushed to the place where the chargers and men were piled like so many slaughtered sheep. Rire-pour-tout laughed such a gay ringing laugh as the desert never had heard. 'Vive la France!' he cried. 'And now bring me my toss of brandy.' Then down headlong out of his stirrups he reeled and fell under his horse; and when we lifted him up there were two broken sword-blades buried in him, and the blood was pouring fast as water out of thirty wounds and more. That was how Rire-pour-tout died, *piou-piou*, laughing to the last. Sacrebleu! it was a splendid end; I wish I were sure of the like."

And Claude de Chanrellon drank down his third beaker, for over much speech made him thirsty.

The men around him emptied their glasses in honor of the dead hero.

"Rire-pour-tout was a *croque-mitaine*," they said, solemnly, with almost a sigh, so tendering by their words the highest funeral oration.

"You have much of such sharp service here, I suppose?" asked a voice in very pure French. The speaker was leaning against the open door of the café; a tall, lightly built man, dressed in a velvet shooting tunic, much the worse for wind and weather, a loose shirt, and jack-boots splashed and worn out.

"When we are at it, monsieur," returned the Chasseur. "I only wish we had more."

"Of course. Are you in need of recruits?"

"They all want to come to us and to the Zouaves," smiled Chanrellon, surveying the figure of the one who addressed him with a keen sense of its symmetry and its sinew. "Still, a good sword brings its welcome. Do you ask seriously, monsieur?"

The bearded Arabs smoking their long pipes, the little *piou-piou* drowning his mortification in some curaçoa, the idlers reading the *Akbah* or the *Presse*, the Chasseurs lounging over their drink, the écarté players lost in their game, all looked up at the new-comer. They thought he looked a likely wearer of the dead honors of Rire-pour-tout.

He did not answer the questions literally, but came over from the doorway and seated himself at the little marble table opposite Claude, leaning his elbows on it.

"I have a doubt," he said. "I am more inclined to your foes."

"Dieu de dieu!" ejaculated Chanrellon, pulling at his tawny moustaches. "A bold thing to say before five Chasseurs."

He smiled a little contemptuously, a little amusedly.

"I am not a *croque-mitaine*,* perhaps; but I say what I think, with little heed of my auditors usually."

Chanrellon bent his bright brown eyes curiously

* Fire-eater.

on him. "He *is* a *croque-mitaine*," he thought. "He is not to be lost."

"I prefer your foes," went on the other, quite quietly, quite listlessly, as though the glittering, gaslit café were not full of French soldiers. "In the first place, they are on the losing side; in the second they are the lords of the soil; in the third, they live as free as air; and in the fourth, they have undoubtedly the right of the quarrel!"

"Monsieur!" cried the Chasseurs, laying their hands on their swords, fiery as lions. He looked indolently and wearily up from under the long lashes of his lids, and went on, as though they had not spoken.

"I will fight you all, if you like, as that worthy of yours, Rire-pour-tout, did, but I don't think it's worth while," he said, carelessly, where he leaned over the marble table. "Brawling's bad style; *we* don't do it. I was saying, I like your foes best; mere matter of taste; no need to quarrel over it—that *I* see. I shall go into their service or into yours, monsieur—will you play a game of dice to decide?"

"Decide?—but how?"

"Why—this way," said the other, with the weary listlessness of one who cares not two straws how things turn. "If I win I go to the Arabs; if you win I come to your ranks."

"Mort de Dieu! it is a droll gambling," murmured Chanrellon. "But—if you do win, do you think we shall let you go off to our enemies? *Pas si bête, monsieur!*"*

"Yes, you will," said the other quietly. "Men who knew what honor meant enough to redeem Rire-pour-tout's pledge of safety to the Bedouins, will not take advantage of an openly confessed and unarmed adversary."

* Not such fools, monsieur.

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A murmur of ratification ran through his listeners.

Chanrellon swore a mighty oath.

"Pardieu, No. You are right. If you want to go, you shall go. Holà there! bring the dice. Champagne, monsieur? vermout? cognac?"

"Nothing, I thank you."

He leant back with an apathetic indolence and indifference, oddly at contrast with the injudicious daring of his war-provoking words, and the rough campaigning that he sought; the assembled Chasseurs eyed him curiously; they liked his manner and they resented his first speeches; they noted every particular about him—his delicate white hands, his weather-worn and travel-stained dress, his fair aristocratic features, his sweeping abundant beard, his careless, cool, tired, reckless way; and they were uncertain what to make of him.

The dice were brought.

"What stakes, monsieur?" asked Chanrellon.

"Ten napoleons a side—and—the Arabs."

He set ten napoleons down on the table; they were the only coins he had in the world; it was very characteristic that he risked them.

They threw the main—two sixes.

"You see," he murmured, with a half smile, "the dice know it is a drawn duel between you and the Arabs."

"C'est un drôle, c'est un brave!"* muttered Chanrellon; and they threw again.

The Chasseur cast a five; his was a five again.

"The dice cannot make up their minds," said the other listlessly, "they know you are Might and the Arabs are Right."

The Frenchmen laughed; they could take a jest good-

* An odd fellow! A brave fellow!

humoredly, and alone amid so many of them he was made sacred at once by the very length of odds against him.

They rattled the boxes and threw again—Chanrellon's was three; his two.

"Ah!" he murmured. "Right kicks the beam and loses; it always does, poor devil!"

The Chasseur leaned across the table, with his brown, fearless, sunny eyes full of pleasure.

"Monsieur! never lament such good fortune for France, you belong to us now; let me claim you!"

He bowed more gravely than he had borne himself hitherto.

"You do me much honor; fortune has willed it so. One word only in stipulation."

Chanrellon assented courteously.

"As many as you choose."

"I have a companion who must be brigaded with me, and I must go on active service at once."

"With infinite pleasure. That doubtless can be arranged. You shall present yourself to-morrow morning; and for to-night, this is not the season here yet, and we are *triste à faire frémir;** still I can show you a little fun, though it is not Paris!"

But he rose and bowed again.

"I thank you, not to-night. You shall see me at your barracks with the morning."

"Ah, ah! monsieur!" cried the Chasseur eagerly, and a little annoyed. "What warrant have we that you will not dispute the decree of the dice, and go off to your favorites, the Arabs?"

He turned back and looked full in Chanrellon's face, his own eyes a little surprised, and infinitely weary.

"What warrant? My promise."

* Frightfully dull.

Then, without another syllable, he lounged slowly out through the soldiers and the idlers, and disappeared in the confused din and chiar'oscuro of the gas-lit street without, through the press of troopers, grisettes, merchants, beggars, sweetmeat-sellers, lemonade-sellers, curaçoa-sellers, gaunt Bedouins, negro boys, shrieking muleteers, laughing lorettes, and glittering staff-officers.

"That is done!" he murmured to his own thoughts. "Now for life under another flag!"

Claude de Chanrellon sat mute and amazed awhile, gazing at the open door; then he drank a fourth beaker of champagne and flung the emptied glass down with a mighty crash.

"Ventrebleu! whoever he is, that man will eat fire, *bons garcons!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

"De Profundis" before "Plunging."

THREE months later, it was guest-night in the mess-room of a certain famous light cavalry regiment, who bear the reputation of being the fastest corps in the English service. Of a truth, they do "plunge" a little too wildly; and stories are told of bets over écarté in their ante-room that have been prompt extinction for ever and aye to the losers, for they rarely play money down, their stakes are too high, and moderate fortunes may go in a night with the other convenient but fatal system. But, this one indiscretion apart, they are a model corps for blood, for dash, for perfect social accord, for the finest horseflesh in the kingdom, and the best president at a mess-table that ever drilled the cook to matchlessness, and made the iced dry, and the old burgundies, the admired of all new-comers.

Just now they had pleasant quarters enough in York, had a couple of hundred hunters, all in all, in their stalls, were showing the Ridings that they could "go like birds," and were using up their second horses with every day out, in the first of the season. A cracker over the best of the ground with the York and Ainsty, that had given two first-rate things quick as lightning, and both closed with a kill, had filled the day; and they were dining with a fair quantity of county guests, and all the splendor of plate, and ceremony, and magnificent hospitalities which characterise those *beaux sabreurs* wheresoever they go. At one part of the table a discussion was going on as the claret passed around; wines were perfection at the mess, but they drank singularly little; it was not their "form" ever to indulge in that way; and the Chief, as dashing a sabreur as ever crossed a saddle, though lenient to looseness in all other matters, and very young for his command, would have been down like steel on "the boys," had any of them taken to the pastime of overmuch drinking in any shape.

"I can't get the rights of the story," said one of the guests, a hunting baronet, and M. F. H. "It's something very dark, isn't it?"

"Very dark," assented a tall handsome man, with an habitual air of the most utterly exhausted apathy ever attained by the human features, but who, nevertheless, had been christened, by the fiercest of the warrior nations of the Punjaub, as the Shumsheer-i-Shaitan, or Sword of the Evil One, so terrible had the circling sweep of one back stroke of his, when he was quite a boy, become to them.

"Guards cut up fearfully rough," murmured one near him, known as "the Dauphin," "such a low sort of

thing, you know, that's the worst of it. Seraph's name, too."

"Poor old Seraph! he's fairly bowled over about it," added a third. "Feels it awfully—by Jove he does! It's my belief he paid those Jew fellows the whole sum to get the pursuit slackened."

"So Thelusson says. Thelusson says Jews have made a cracker by it. *I* dare say! Jews always do," muttered a fourth. "First Life would have given Beauty a million sooner than have him do it. Horrible thing for the Household."

"But is he dead?" pursued their guest.

"Beauty? Yes; smashed in that express, you know."

"But there was no evidence?"

"I don't know what you call evidence?" murmured "the Dauphin." "Horses are sent to England from Paris; clearly shows he went to Paris. Marseilles train smashes; twenty people ground into indistinguishable amalgamation; two of the amalgamated jammed head foremost in a carriage alone; only traps in carriage with them, Beauty's traps, with name clear on the brass outside, and crest clear on silver things inside; two men ground to atoms, but traps safe; two men, of course Beauty and servant; man was a plucky fellow, sure to stay with him."

And having given the desired evidence in lazy little intervals of speech, he took some Rhenish.

"Well—yes; nothing could be more conclusive, certainly," assented the Baronet, resignedly convinced. "It was the best thing that could happen under the unfortunate circumstances, so Lord Royallieu thinks, I suppose. He allowed no one to wear mourning, and had his unhappy son's portrait taken down and burnt."

"How melodramatic!" reflected Leo Charteris. "Now

what the deuce can it hurt a dead man to have his portrait made into a bonfire? Old lord always did hate Beauty, though. Rock does all the mourning; he's cut up no end; never saw a fellow so knocked out of time. Vowed at first he'd sell out, and go into the Austrian service; swore he couldn't stay in the Household, but would get a command of some Heavies, and be changed to India."

"Duke didn't like that—didn't want him shot; nobody else, you see, for the title. By George! I wish you'd seen Rock the other day on the Heath; little Pulteney came up to him."

"What Pulteney?—Jimmy, or the Earl?"

"Oh, the Earl. Jimmy would have known better. These new men never know anything. 'You purchased that famous steeple-chaser of his from Mr. Cecil's creditors, didn't you?' asks Pulteney. Rock just looks him over. Such a look, by George! 'I received Forest King as my dead friend's last gift.' Pulteney never takes the hint—not he. On he blunders: 'Because, if you were inclined to part with him, I want a good new hunting strain, with plenty of fencing power, and I'd take him for the stud at any figure you liked.' I thought the Seraph would have knocked him down—I did, upon my honor! He was red as this wine in a second with rage, and then as white as a woman. 'You are quite right,' he says quietly, and I swear each word cut like a bullet, 'you *do* want a new strain with something like breeding in it, but—I hardly think you'll get it for the three next generations. You must learn to know what it means first.' Then away he lounges, leaving Pulteney *planté-là*. By Jove! I don't think the Cotton-Earl will forget this Cambridgeshire in a hurry, or try horse-dealing on the Seraph again."

Laughter loud and long greeted the story.

"Poor Beauty!" said the Dauphin, "he'd have enjoyed that. He always put down Pulteney himself. I remember his telling me he was on duty at Windsor once when Pulteney was staying there. Pulteney's always horribly funked at Court; frightened out of his life when he dines with any royalties; makes an awful figure too in a public ceremony; can't walk backward for any money, and at his first levee tumbled down right in the Queen's face. Now at the Castle one night he just happened to come down a corridor as Beauty was smoking. Beauty made believe to take him for a servant, took out a sovereign, and tossed it to him. 'Here, keep a still tongue about my cigar, my good fellow!' Pulteney turned hot and cold, and stammered out God knows what, about his mighty dignity being mistaken for a valet. Bertie just laughed a little, ever so softly. 'Beg your pardon—thought you were one of the people; wouldn't have done it for worlds; I know you're never at ease with a sovereign!' Now Pulteney wasn't likely to forget that. If he wanted the King, I'll lay any money it was to give him to some wretched mount who'd break his back over a fence in a selling race."

"Well, he won't have him; Seraph don't intend to have the horse ever ridden or hunted at all."

"Nonsense!"

"By Jove, he means it! nobody's to cross the King's back; he wants weight carriers himself, you know, and precious strong ones too. The King's put in the stud at Lyonnesse. Poor Bertie! nobody ever managed a close finish as he did at the Grand National—last but two—don't you remember?"

"Yes; waited so beautifully on Fly-by-Night, and shot

by him like lightning just before the run-in. Pity he went to the bad!"

"Ah! what a hand he played at écarté; the very best of the French science."

"But reckless at whist; a wild game there—uncommonly wild. Drove Cis Delareux half mad one night at Royallieu with the way he threw his trumps out. Old Cis dashed his cards down at last, and looked him full in the face. 'Beauty, do you know, or do you *not* know, that a whist-table is not to be taken as you take timber in a hunting-field, on the principle of clear it or smash it?'—'Faith!' said Bertie, 'clear it or smash it, is a very good rule for anything, but a trifle too energetic for me.'"

"The deuce, he's had enough of 'smashing' at last! I wish he hadn't come to grief in that style; it's a shocking bore for the Guards,—such an ugly story."

"It was uncommonly like him to get killed just when he did,—best possible taste."

"Only thing he could do."

"Better taste would have been to do it earlier. I always wondered he stopped for the row."

"Oh, never thought it would turn up; trusted to a fluke."

He whom the Punjaub knew as the Sword of the Evil One, but who held in polite society the title of Lord Kergenven, drank some hock slowly, and murmured as his sole quota to the conversation very lazily and languidly.

"Bet you he isn't dead at all."

"The deuce you do? And why?" chorused the table; "when a fellow's body's found with all his traps round him!"

"I don't believe he's dead," murmured Kergenven with closed slumberous eyes.

"But why? Have you heard anything?"

"Not a word."

"Why do you say he's alive then?"

My lord lifted his brows ever so little.

"I think so, that's all."

"But you must have a reason, Ker?"

Badgered into speech, Kergenven drank a little more hock, and dropped out slowly in the mellowest voice in the world the following:

"It don't follow one has reasons for anything: pray don't get logical. Two years ago I was out in a *chasse au sanglier*, central France; perhaps you don't know their work? It's uncommonly queer. Break up the Alps into little bits, scatter 'em pell-mell over a great forest, and then set a killing pack to hunt through and through it. Delightful chance for coming to grief; even odds that if you don't pitch down a ravine, you'll get blinded for life by a branch; that if you don't get flattened under a boulder, you'll be shot by a twig catching your rifle-trigger. Uncommonly good sport."

Exhausted with so lengthened an exposition of the charms of the *vénérie* and the *hallali*, he stopped, and dropped a walnut into some Regency sherry.

"Hang it, Ker!" cried the Dauphin. "What's that to do with Beauty?"

My lord let fall a sleepy glance of surprise and of rebuke from under his black lashes, that said mutely, "Do I, who hate talking, ever talk wide of any point?"

"Why this?" he murmured. "He was with us down at Veilleroc, Louis d'Auvrai's place, you know; and we were out after an old boar—not too old to *race;* but still tough enough to be likely to turn and trust to his tusks if the pace got very hot, and he was hard pressed at the finish. We hadn't found, till rather late, the *limeurs* were

rather new to the work, and the November day was short, of course; the pack got on the slot of a roebuck too, and were off the boar's scent a little while, running wild. Altogether we got scattered, and in the forest it grew almost as dark as pitch: you followed just as you could, and could only guide yourself by your ear when the hounds gave cry, or the horns sounded. On you blundered, hit or miss, headlong down the rocks and through the branches; horses warmed wonderfully to the business, scrambled like cats, slid down like otters, kept their footing where nobody'd have thought anything but a goat could stand. *Our* hunting bloods knock up over a cramped country like Monmouthshire; they wouldn't live an hour in a French forest: you see we just look for pace and strength in the shoulders, we don't much want anything else—except good jumping power. What a lot of fellows—even in the crack packs—will always funk water! Horses will *fly*, but they can't swim. Now to my fancy, a clever beast ought to take even a swelling bit of water like a duck. How poor Standard breasted rivers till that fool staked him!"

He dropped more walnuts into his wine, wistfully recalling a mighty hero of Leicestershire fame, that had given him many a magnificent day out, and had been the idol of his stables, till in his twelfth year the noble old sorrel had been killed by a groom's recklessness; recklessness that met with such chastisement, as told how and why the hill-tribes' sobriquet had been given to the hand that would lie so long in indolent rest, to strike with such fearful force when once raised.

"Well," he went on once more. "We were all of us scattered; scarcely two kept together anywhere; where the pack was, where the boar was, where the huntsmen were, nobody knew. Now and then I heard the hounds

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giving tongue at the distance, and I rode after that to the best of my science, and uncommonly bad was the best. That forest work perplexes one after the grass-country. You can't view the beauties two minutes together; and as for sinning by overriding 'em, you're very safe not to do that! At last I heard a crashing sound loud and furious; I thought they had got him to bay at last. There was a great oak thicket as hard as iron, and as close as a net, between me and the place; the boughs were all twisted together, God knows how, and grew so low down, that the naked branches had to be broken through at every step by the horse's fore hoofs, before he could force a step. We did force it somehow at last, and came into a green open space, where there were fewer trees, and the moon was shining in; there, without a hound near, true enough was the boar rolling on the ground, and somebody rolling under him, they were locked in so close they looked just like one huge beast, pitching here and there, as you've seen the rhinos wallow in Indian jheels. Of course, I levelled my rifle, but I waited to get a clear aim; for which was man and which was boar, the deuce a bit could I tell; just as I had pointed, Beauty's voice called out to me: 'Keep your fire, Ker! I want to have him myself.' It was he that was under the brute. Just as he spoke they rolled toward me, the boar foaming and spouting blood, and plunging his tusks into Cecil; he got his right arm out from under the beast, and crushed under there as he was, drew it free with the knife well gripped; then down he dashed it three times into the veteran's hide, just beneath the ribs; it was the *coup de grace*, the boar lay dead, and Beauty lay half dead too, the blood rushing out of him where the tusks had dived. Two minutes, though, and a draught of my brandy brought him all

round; and the first words he spoke were, 'Thanks, Ker, you did as you would be done by—a shot would have spoilt it all.' The brute had crossed his path far away from the pack, and he had flung himself out of saddle and had a neck-and-neck struggle. And that night we played baccarat by his bedside to amuse him; and he played just as well as ever. Now this is why I don't think he's dead; a fellow who served a wild boar like that, won't have let a train knock him over. And I don't believe he forged that stiff, though all the evidence says so; Beauty hadn't a touch of the blackguard in him."

With which declaration of his views, Kergenven lapsed into immutable silence and slumberous apathy, from whose shelter nothing could tempt him afresh; and the Colonel, with all the rest, lounged into the ante-room, where the tables were set, and began "plunging" in earnest at sums that might sound fabulous, were they written here. The players staked heavily; but it was the *galérie* who watched around, making their bets, and backing their favorites, that lost on the whole the most.

"Horse Guards have heard of the plunging; think we're going too fast," murmured the chief to Kergenven, his Major, who lifted his brows, and murmured back with the demureness of a maiden:

"Tell 'em it's our only vice; we're models of propriety."

Which possibly would not have been received with the belief desirable by the sceptics of Pall Mall.

So the De Profundis was said over Bertie Cecil; and "Beauty of the Brigades" ceased to be named in the service, and soon ceased to be even remembered. In the steeple-chase of life there is no time to look back at the failures, who have broken down over a "double and drop," and fallen out of the pace.

CHAPTER XV.

"L'Amie du Drapeau."

"DID I not say he would eat fire?"

"Pardieu! *c'est un brave.*"

"Rides like an Arab."

"Smokes like a Zouave."

"Cuts off a head with that back circular sweep,—ah—h—h! magnificent!"

"And dances like an Aristocrat; not like a tipsy Spahis!"

The last crown to the chorus of applause, and insult to the circle of applauders, was launched with all the piquance of inimitable canteen-slang and camp-assurance, from a speaker who had perched astride on a broken fragment of wall, with her barrel of wine set up on end on the stones in front of her, and her six soldiers, her *gros bébées*,* as she was given maternally to calling them, lounging at their ease on the arid dusty turf below. She was very pretty, audaciously pretty, though her skin was burned to a bright sunny brown, and her hair was cut as short as a boy's, and her face had not one regular feature in it. But then—regularity! who wanted it, who would have thought the most pure classic type a change for the better, with those dark, dancing, challenging eyes, with that arch, brilliant, kitten-like face, so sunny, so *mignon*, and those scarlet lips like a bud of camellia that were never so handsome as when a cigarette was between them, or, sooth to say, not seldom a *brûle gueule*** itself?

She was pretty, she was insolent, she was intolerably coquettish, she was mischievous as a marmoset, she would swear if need be like a Zouave, she could fire galloping,

* Big babies. ** Short pipe.

she could toss off her brandy or her vermout like a trooper, she would on occasion clinch her little brown hand and deal a blow that the recipient would not covet twice, she was an *enfant de Paris* and had all its wickedness at her fingers, she would sing you *guinguette* songs till you were suffocated with laughter, and she would dance the *cancan* at the Salle de Mars, with the biggest giant of a Cuirassier there. And yet with all that she was not wholly unsexed, with all that she had the delicious fragrance of youth, and had not left a certain feminine grace behind her, though she wore a vivandière's uniform, and had been born in a barrack, and meant to die in a battle; it was the blending of the two that made her piquante, made her a notoriety in her own way; known at pleasure, and equally, in the army of Africa as "Cigarette," and "L'Amie du Drapeau."

"Not like a tipsy Spahis!" it was a cruel cut to her *gros bébées*, mostly Spahis, lying there at her feet, or rather at the foot of the wall, singing their praises—with magnanimity beyond praise—of a certain Chasseur d'Afrique.

"Ho, Cigarette!" growled a little Zouave, known as Tata Leroux. "That is the way thou forsakest thy friends for the first fresh face."

"Well, it is not a face like a tobacco-stopper, as thine is, Tata!" responded Cigarette with a puff of her namesake; the repartee of the camp is apt to be rough. "He is *Bel-à-faire-peur*, as you nickname him."

"A woman's face!" growled the injured Tata; whose own countenance was of the color and well-nigh of the flatness of one of the red bricks of the wall.

"Ouf!" said the Friend of the Flag with more expression in that single ejaculation than could be put in a volume. "He does woman's deeds, does he? He has

woman's hands, but they can fight, I fancy? Six Arabs to his own sword the other day in that skirmish! Superb!"

"Sapristi! And what did he say, this droll, when he looked at them lying there? Just shrugged his shoulders and rode away. 'I'd better have killed myself, less mischief on the whole!' Now who is to make anything of such a man as that?"

"Ah! he did not stop to cut their gold buttons off, and steal their cangiars, as thou wouldst have done, Tata? Well! he has not learnt *la guerre*,"* laughed Cigarette. "It was a waste; he should have brought me their sashes at least. By-the-way—when did he join?"

"Ten—twelve—years ago, or thereabouts."

"He should have learnt to strip Arabs by this time, then," said the Amie du Drapeau, turning the tap of her barrel to replenish the wine-cup; "and to steal from them too, living or dead. *Thou* must take him in hand, Tata!"

Tata laughed, considering that he had received a compliment.

"Diable! I did a neat thing yesterday. Out on the hills, there, was a shepherd; he'd got two live geese swinging by their feet. They were screeching—screeching—screeching!—and they looked so nice and so plump, that I could smell them, as if they were stewing in a casserole, till I began to get as hungry as a gamin. A lunge would just have cut the question at once; but the orders have got so strict about potting the natives, I thought I wouldn't have any violence, if the thing would go nice and smoothly. So I just walked behind him, and tripped him up before he knew where he was;—it was a picture! He was down with his face in the sand before you could sing Tra-la-la! Then I just sat upon him; but gently—very gently: and what with the sand

* The art of war.

and the heat, and the surprise, and, in truth, perhaps, a little too, my own weight, he was half-suffocated. He had never seen me; he did not know what it was that was sitting on him; and I sent my voice out with a roar —'I am a demon, and the fiend hath bidden me take him thy soul to-night!' Ah! how he began to tremble, and to kick, and to quiver. He thought it was the devil a-top of him; and he began to moan as well as the sand would let him, that he was a poor man, and an innocent, and the geese were the only things he ever stole in all his life. Then I went through a little pantomime with him, and I was very terrible in my threats, and he was choking and choking with the sand, though he never let go of the geese. At last, I relented a little, and told him I would spare him that once, if he gave up the stolen goods, and never lifted his head for an hour. Sapristi! how glad he was of the terms! I dare say my weight was unpleasant; so the geese made us a divine stew that night, and the last thing I saw of my man was his lying flat as I left him, with his face still down in the sand-hole."

Cigarette nodded and laughed.

"Pretty fair, Tata; but I have heard better. Bah! a grand thing certainly, to fright a peasant, and scamper off with a goose!"

"Sacre bleu!" grumbled Tata, who was himself of opinion that his exploit had been worthy of the feats of Harlequin; "thy heart is all gone to the Englishman."

Cigarette laughed saucily and heartily, tickled at the joke. Sentiment has an exquisitely ludicrous side when one is a *vivandière aux yeux noirs*,* perched astride on a wall, and dispensing brandy-dashed wine to half a dozen sun-baked Spahis.

* A black-eyed wine-seller.

"Vivandière du régiment,
C'est Catin qu'on me nomme;
Je vends, je donne, je bois gaiement,
Mon vin et mon rogomme:
J'ai le pied leste et l'œil mutin,
Tintin, tintin, tintin, r'lin tintin,
Soldats, voilà Catin!"

she sang with the richest, freshest, mellowest voice that ever chanted the deathless refrains of the French Lucilius.

"My heart is a *reveil matin*, Tata; it wakes fresh every day. An Englishman, perdie! Why dost thou think him that?"

"Because he is a giant," said Tata.

Cigarette snapped her fingers:

"I have danced with grenadiers and cuirassiers quite as tall, and twice as heavy. *Après?*"

"Because he bathes—splash! like any water-dog."

"Because he is silent."

"Because he rises in his stirrups."

"Because he likes the sea."

"Because he knows *le boxe.*"*

"Because he is so quiet, and blazes like the devil underneath."

Under which mass of overwhelming proofs of nationality the Amie du Drapeau gave in.

"Yes, like enough. Besides, the other one is English. Lour-i-loo, of the *Chasses-marais*,** tells me that the other one waits on him like a slave when he can—cleans his harness, litters his horse, saves him all the hard work, when he can do it without being found out. Where did they come from?"

"They will never tell."

Cigarette tossed her nonchalant head, with a pout of her cherry lips, and a slang oath, light as a bird, wicked as a rigolbochade.

* Boxing. ** Chasseurs.

"Paf!—they will tell it to me!"

"Chut! Thou mayest make a lion tame, a vulture leave blood, a drum beat its own rataplan, a dead man fire a *clarinette* à six pieds;* but thou wilt never make an Englishman speak when he is bent to be silent."

Cigarette launched a choice missile of barrack slang at an array of metaphors, which their propounder thought stupendous in their brilliancy.

"*Bécasse!* When you stole your geese, you did but take your brethren home! Englishmen are but men. Put the wine in their head, make them whirl in a waltz, promise them a kiss, and one turns such brains as they have inside out, as a *piou-piou*** turns a dead soldier's wallet. When a woman is handsome, she is never denied. He shall tell me where he comes from. I doubt that it is from England; see here—why not?" and she checked the Noes off on her lithe brown fingers: "first, he never says God-damn; second, he don't eat his meat raw; third, he speaks very soft; fourth, he waltzes so light, so light! fifth he never grumbles in his throat like an angry bear; sixth, there is no fog in him. How can he be English with all that?"

"There are English, and English," said the philosophic Tata, who piqued himself on being serenely cosmopolitan.

Cigarette blew a contemptuous puff of smoke.

"There was never one yet that did not growl! *Pauvres diables!* if they don't use their tusks, they sit and sulk!—an Englishman is always boxing or grumbling;—the two make up his life."

Which view of *Anglo-rabies* she had derived from a profound study of various vaudevilles, in which the traditional God-dam was pre-eminent in his usual hues;

* A musket. ** Infantry soldier.

and having delivered it, she sprang down from her wall, strapped on her little *barillet*,* nodded to her gros bébées, where they lounged full length in the shadow of the stone wall, and left them to resume their game at Boc, while she started on her way, as swift and as light as a chamois, singing, with gay ringing emphasis, that echoed all down the hot and silent air, the second verse of Béranger:

"Je fus chère à tous nos héros;
Hélas! combien j'en pleure,
Ainsi soldats et généraux
Me comblaient à toute heure,
D'amour, de gloire et de butin,
Tintin, tintin, tintin, r'lin tintin,
D'amour, de gloire et de butin,
Soldats, voilà Catin!"

The song was not altogether her song, however, for she had wept for none—wept not at all: she had never shed tears in her life. A dashing, dauntless, vivacious life, just in its youth, loving plunder, and mischief, and mirth; caring for nothing; and always ready with a laugh, a song, a slang repartee, or a shot from the dainty pistols thrust in her sash, that a general of division had given her, whichever best suited the moment.

Her mother a camp-follower, her father nobody knew who, a spoilt child of the Army from her birth, with a heart as bronzed as her cheek, and her respect for the laws of meum and tuum *nil*, yet with odd stray, nature-sown instincts here and there, of a devil-may-care nobility, and of a wild grace that nothing could kill—Cigarette was the pet of the Army of Africa, and was as lawless as most of her patrons.

She would eat a succulent duck, thinking it all the spicier because it had been a soldier's "loot;" she would wear the gold plunder off dead Arabs' dress, and never

* Little barrel.

have a pang of conscience with it; she would dance all night long, when she had a chance, like a little Bacchante; she would shoot a man, if need be, with all the nonchalance in the world. She had had a thousand lovers, from handsome marquesses of the Guides to tawny black-browed scoundrels in the Zouaves, and she had never loved anything, except the roll of the *pas de charge*, and the sight of her own arch defiant face, with its scarlet lips and its short jetty hair, when she saw it by chance in some burnished cuirass, that served her for a mirror. She was more like a handsome saucy boy than anything else under the sun, and yet there was that in the pretty, impudent, little Friend of the Flag that was feminine with it all—generous and graceful amid all her boldness and her licence, her revelries, and the unsettled life she led in the barracks and the camps, under the shadow of the eagles.

Away she went, now singing—

"Mais je ris en sage,
Bon!
La farira dondaine,
Gai!
La farira dondée!"

down the crooked windings and over the ruined gardens of the old Moorish quarter of the Cashbah, the hilts of the tiny pistols glancing in the sun, and the fierce fire of the burning sunlight pouring down unheeded on the brave bright hawk eyes that had never, since they first opened to the world, drooped or dimmed for the rays of the sun, or the gaze of a lover, for the menace of death, or the presence of war.

Of course, she was a little Amazon; of course, she was a little Guerilla; of course, she did not know what a blush meant; of course, her thoughts were as slang and as riotous as her mutinous mischief was in its act; but

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she was "*bon soldat*," as she was given to say, with a toss of her curly head, and she had some of the virtues of soldiers. Soldiers had been about her ever since she first remembered having a wooden casserole for a cradle, and sucking down red wine through a pipe-stem. Soldiers had been her books, her teachers, her models, her guardians, and, later on, her lovers, all the days of her life. She had had no guiding star, except the eagles on the standards; she had had no cradle-song, except the rataplan and the reveille; she had had no sense of duty taught her, except to face fire boldly, never to betray a comrade, and to worship but two deities, "la Gloire" and "la France."

Yet there were tales told in the barrack-yards and under canvas of the little Amie du Drapeau, that had a gentler side. Of how softly she would touch the wounded; of how deftly she would cure them. Of how carelessly she would dash through under a raking fire, to take a draught of water to a dying man. Of how she had sat by an old Grenadier's death-couch, to sing to him, refusing to stir, though it was a fête at Châlons, and she loved fêtes as only a French girl can. Of how she had ridden twenty leagues on a saddleless Arab horse, to fetch the surgeon of the Spahis to a Bedouin perishing in the desert of shot wounds. Of how she had sent every sou of her money to her mother, so long as that mother lived—a brutal, drunk, vile-tongued old woman, who had beaten her oftentimes, as the sole maternal attention, when she was but an infant. These things were told of Cigarette, and with a perfect truth. She was "*mauvais sujet, mais bon soldat*,"* as she classified herself. Her own sex would have seen no good in her; but her comrades-at-arms could and did. Of a surety,

* A thorough scamp, but a thorough soldier.

she missed virtues that women prize; but, not less of a surety had she caught some that they miss.

Singing her refrain, on she dashed now, swift as a greyhound, light as a hare, glancing here and glancing there as she bounded over the picturesque desolation of the Cashbah; it was just noon, and there were few could brave the noon-heat as she did; it was very still, there was only from a little distance the roll of the French kettledrums where the drummers of the African regiments were practising. "Holà! le v'là!" cried Cigarette to herself, as her falcon-eyes darted right and left; and, like a chamois, she leaped down over the great masses of Turkish ruins, cleared the channel of a dry water-course, and alighted just in front of a Chasseur d'Afrique, who was sitting alone on a broken fragment of white marble, relic of some Moorish mosque, whose delicate columns, crowned with wind-sown grasses, rose behind him, against the deep intense blue of the cloudless sky.

He was sitting thoughtfully enough, almost wearily, tracing figures in the dry sand of the soil with the point of his scabbard; yet he had all the look about him of a brilliant French soldier, of one who, moreover, had seen hot and stern service. He was bronzed, but scarcely looked so after the red, brown, and black of the Zouaves and the Turcos, for his skin was naturally very fair, the features delicate, the eyes very soft—for which Monsieur Tata had growled contemptuously, "a woman's face"—a long, silken chestnut beard swept over his chest; and his figure, as he leaned there in the blue and scarlet and gold of the Chasseurs' uniform, with his spurred heel thrust into the sand, and his arm resting on his knee, was, as Cigarette's critical eye told her, the figure of a superb cavalry rider, light, supple, long of limb, wide of chest, with every sinew and nerve firm knit as links of

steel. She glanced at his hands, which were very white, despite the sun of Algiers, and the labors that fall to a private of Chasseurs.

"*Beau lion!*"* she thought, "and noble, whatever he is."

But the best of blood was not new to her in the ranks of the Algerian regiments; she had known so many of them—those gilded butterflies of the Chaussée d'Antin, those lordly spendthrifts of the *vieille roche*, who had served in the battalions of the demi-cavalerie, or the squadrons of the French Horse, to be thrust nameless and unhonored into a sand-hole hastily dug with the bayonets in the hot hush of an African night.

She woke him unceremoniously from his reverie, with a challenge to wine.

"Ah-ha, mon Roumi!** Tata Leroux says you are English; by the faith, he must be right, or you would never sit musing there like an owl in the sunlight! Take a draught of my burgundy; bright as rubies. I never sell bad wines—not I! I know better than to drink them myself."

He started and rose; and, before he took the *bidon*,*** bowed to her, raising his cap with a grave courteous obeisance, a bow that had used to be noted in throne rooms for its perfection of grace.

"Ah, ma belle, is it you?" he said, wearily. "You do me much honor."

Cigarette gave a little petulant twist to the tap of her wine-barrel. She was not used to that style of salutation. She half liked it—half resented it. It made her wish, with an impatient scorn for the wish, that she knew how to read, and had not her hair cut short like a boy's

* A handsome dandy. ** Soldier.

*** Little wooden drinking-cup.

—a weakness the little vivandière had never been visited with before.

"Morbleu!" she said, pettishly. "You are too fine for us, *mon brave*. In what country, I should wonder, does one learn such dainty ceremony as that?"

"Where should one learn courtesies if not in France?" he answered, wearily. He had danced with this girl-soldier the night before at a *guinguette* ball, seeing her for the first time, for it was almost the first time he had been in the city since the night when he had thrown the dice, and lost ten Napoléons and the Bedouins to Claude de Chanrellon; but his thoughts were far from her in this moment.

"Ouf! you have learnt carte and tierce with your tongue!" cried Cigarette, provoked to receive no more compliment than that. From generals and staff-officers, as from drummers and trumpeters, she was accustomed to flattery and wooing, luscious as sugared chocolate, and ardent as flirtation, with a barrack flavor about it, commonly is; she would, as often as not, to be sure, finish it with the butt-end of her pistol, or the butt-end of some bit of stinging sarcasm, but still for all that she liked it, and resented its omission. "They say you are English, but I don't believe it; you speak too soft, and you sound the double L's too well. A Spaniard, eh?"

"Do you find me so devout a Catholic that you think so?"

She laughed. "A Greek, then?"

"Still worse. Have you seen me cheat at cards?"

"An Austrian? You waltz like a White Coat!"

He shook his head.

She stamped her little foot into the ground—a foot fit for a model, with its shapely military boot; spurred, too, for Cigarette rode like a circus-rider.

"*Bécasse!** say what you are, then, at once."

"A soldier of France. Can you wish me more?"

For the first time her eyes flashed and softened—her one love was the tricolor.

"True!" she said, simply. "But you were not always a soldier of France? You joined, they say, twelve years ago? What were you before then?"

She here cast herself down in front of him, and, with her elbows on the sand, and her chin on her hands, watched him with all the frank curiosity and unmoved nonchalance imaginable, as she launched the question point-blank.

"Before!" he said slowly. "Well—a fool."

"You belonged to the majority, then!" said Cigarette, with a piquance made a thousand times more piquant by the camp slang she spoke in. "You should not have had to come into the ranks, *mon ami;* majorities—specially that majority—have very smooth sailing generally!"

He looked at her more closely, though she wearied him.

"Where have you got your ironies, Cigarette? You are so young."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Bah! one is never young, and always young in camps. Young? Pardieu! When I was four, I could swear like a grenadier, plunder like a préfet, lie like a priest, and drink like a Bohemian."

Yet—with all that—and it was the truth, the brow was so open under the close rings of the curls, the skin so clear under the sun-tan, the mouth so rich and so arch in its youth!

"Why did you come into the service?" she went on,

* Literally "you snipe!" Equivalent to "you goose!"

before he had a chance to answer her. "You were born in the Noblesse—bah! I know an aristocrat at a glance! *Ceux qui ont pris la peine de naître!** —don't you like *Figaro?* My men played it last winter, and I was Figaro myself. Now many of those aristocrats come; shoals of them; but it is always for something. They all come for something; most of them have been ruined by the *lionnes*, a hundred million of francs gone in a quarter! Ah-bah! what blind bats the best of you are! They have gambled, or bet, or got into hot water, or fought too many duels, or caused a court scandal, or something; all the aristocrats that come to Africa are ruined. What ruined you, monsieur l'Aristocrat?"

"Aristocrat? I am none. I am a Corporal of the Chasseurs."

"Diable! I have known a Duke a Corporal! What ruined you?"

"What ruins most men, I imagine—folly."

"Folly sure enough!" retorted Cigarette, with scornful acquiescence. She had no patience with him. He danced so deliciously, he looked so superb, and he would give her nothing but these absent answers. "Wisdom don't bring men who look as you look into the ranks of the volunteers for Africa. Besides, you are too handsome to be a sage!"

He laughed a little.

"I never was one, that's certain. And you are too pretty to be a cynic."

"A what?" she did not know the word. "Is that a good cigar you have? Give me one. Do women smoke in your old country?"

"Oh, yes—many of them."

"Where is it, then?"

* Those who have given themselves the trouble to be born!

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"I have no country—now."

"But the one you had?"

"I have forgotten I ever had one."

"Did it treat you ill, then?"

"Not at all."

"Had you anything you cared for in it?"

"Well—yes."

"What was it? A woman?"

"No—a horse."

He stooped his head a little as he said it, and traced more figures slowly in the sand.

"Ah!"

She drew a short, quick breath. She understood that; she would only have laughed at him had it been a woman; Cigarette was more veracious than complimentary in her estimate of her own sex.

"There was a man in the Cuirassiers I knew," she went on softly, "loved a horse like that;—he would have died for Cossack; but he was a terrible gambler, terrible. Not but what I like play myself. Well, one day he played and played till he was mad, and everything was gone; and then in his rage he staked the only thing he had left—staked and lost the horse! He never said a word; but he just slipped a pistol in his pocket, went to the stable, kissed Cossack once—twice—thrice—and shot himself through the heart!"

"Poor fellow!" murmured the Chasseur d'Afrique, in his chestnut beard.

Cigarette was watching him with all the keenness of her falcon eyes; "he has gambled away a good deal too," she thought. "It is always the same old story with them."

"Your cigars are good, *mon lion*," she said impatiently, as she sprang up, her lithe elastic figure in the bright

vivandière uniform standing out in full relief against the pearly gray of the ruined pillars, the vivid green of the rank vegetation, and the intense light of the noon. "Your cigars are good, but it is more than your company is! *Ma cantche!* If you had been as dull as this last night, I would not have danced a single turn with you in the cancan!"

And with a bound to which indignation lent wings like a swallow's, the Friend of the Flag, insulted and amazed at the apathy with which her advances to friendship had been received, dashed off at her topmost speed, singing all the louder out of bravado. "To have nothing more to say to me after dancing with me all night!" thought Cigarette, with fierce wrath at such contumely, the first neglect the pet of the Spahis had ever experienced.

She was incensed too that she had been degraded into that momentary wish that she knew how to read, and looked less like a boy—just because a Chasseur with white hands and silent ways had made her a grave bow! She was more incensed still because she could not get at his history, and felt, despite herself, a reluctance to bribe him for it with those cajoleries whose potency she had boasted to Tata Leroux. "*Gare à lui!*"* muttered the soldier-coquette passionately, in her little white teeth, so small and so pearly, though they had gripped a bridle tight before then, when each hand was filled with a pistol. "*Gare à lui!* If he offend *me* there are five hundred swords that will thrust civility into him, five hundred shots that will teach him the cost of daring to provoke Cigarette!"

En route through the town her wayward way took the pretty brunette Friend of the Flag as many devious meanderings as a bird takes in a summer's day flight,

* Let him take care.

when it stops here for a berry, there for a grass seed, here to dip its beak into cherries, there to dart after a dragon-fly, here to shake its wings in a brook, there to poise on a lily-bell.

She loitered in a thousand places, for Cigarette knew everybody; she chatted with a group of Turcos, she emptied her barrel for some Zouaves, she ate sweetmeats with a lot of negro boys, she boxed a little drummer's ear for slurring over the "r'lin tintin" at his practice, she drank a demi-tasse with some officers at a café, she had ten minutes' pistol-shooting, where she beat hollow a young dandy of the Guides who had come to look at Algiers for a week, and made even points with one of the first shots of the "*Cavalerie à pied*,"* as the Algerian antithesis runs. Finally, she paused before the open French window of a snow-white villa, half buried in tamarisk and orange and pomegranate, with the deep-hued flowers glaring in the sun, and a hedge of wild cactus fencing it in; through the cactus she made her way as easily as a rabbit burrows; it would have been an impossibility to Cigarette to enter by any ordinary means; and balancing herself lightly on the sill for a second, stood looking in at the chamber.

"Ho, M. le Marquis! the Zouaves have drunk all my wine up; fill me my keg with yours for once—the very best burgundy, mind. I am half afraid your cellar will hurt my reputation."

The chamber was very handsome, hung and furnished in the very best Paris fashion, and all glittering with amber and ormolu and velvets; in it half a dozen men —officers of the cavalry—were sitting over their noon breakfast, and playing at lansquenet at the same time.

* Literally "Horse-Foot;" a name given to the Zephyrs and Zouaves for their excessive swiftness of limb.

The table was crowded with dishes of every sort, and wines of every vintage, and the fragrance of their bouquet, the clouds of smoke, and the heavy scent of the orange blossom without, mingled together in an intense perfume. He whom she addressed, M. le Marquis de Châteauroy, laughed, and looked up.

"Ah, is it thee, my pretty brunette? Take what thou wantest out of the ice-pails."

"*Premier cru?*"* asked Cigarette, with the dubious air and caution of a connoisseur.

"Comet!" said M. le Marquis, amused with the precautions taken with his cellar, one of the finest in Algiers. "Come in and have some breakfast, *ma belle*. Only pay the toll."

Where he sat between the window and the table he caught her in his arms and drew her pretty face down; Cigarette, with the laugh of a saucy child, whisked her cigar out of her mouth, and blew a great cloud of smoke in his eyes. She had no particular fancy for him, though she had for his wines; shouts of mirth from the other men completed the Marquis's discomfiture, as she swayed away from him, and went over to the other side of the table, emptying some bottles unceremoniously into her wine-keg; iced, ruby, perfumy claret that she could not have bought anywhere for the barracks.

"Holà!" cried the Marquis, "thou art not generally so coy with thy kisses, petite."

Cigarette tossed her head.

"I don't like bad clarets after good! I've just been with your Corporal, 'Bel-à-faire-peur;' you are no beauty after him, M. le Colonel."

Châteauroy's face darkened; he was a colossal-limbed man, whose bone was iron, and whose muscles were like

* The best growths?

oak-fibres; he had a dark, keen head like an eagle's, the brow narrow but very high, looking higher because the close-cut hair was worn off the temples, thin lips hidden by heavy curling moustaches, and a skin burnt black by long African service. Still he was fairly handsome enough not to have muttered so heavy an oath as he did at the vivandière's jest.

"Sacrebleu! I wish my corporal were shot! one can never hear the last of him."

Cigarette darted a quick glance at him. "Oh ho, jealous, mon brave!" thought her quick wits. "And why, I wonder?"

"You haven't a finer soldier in your Chasseurs, mon cher; don't wish him shot, for the good of the service," said the Viscount de Chanrellon, who had now a command of his own in the Light Cavalry of Algiers. "Pardieu! if I had to choose whether I'd be backed by 'Bel-à-faire-peur,' or by six other men in a skirmish, I'd choose him, and risk the odds."

Châteauroy tossed off his burgundy with a contemptuous impatience.

"Diable! that is the *galimatias** one always hears about this fellow—as if he were a second Roland, or a revivified Bayard! *I* see nothing particular in him, except that he's too fine a gentleman for the ranks."

"Fine? ah!" laughed Cigarette. "He made me a bow this morning like a court chamberlain; and his beard is like carded silk, and he has such woman's hands, mon Dieu! But he is a *croque-mitaine* too."

"Rather!" laughed Claude de Chanrellon, as magnificent a soldier himself as ever crossed swords. "I said he would eat fire the very minute he played that queer game at dice with me years ago. I wish I had him

* Exaggerated nonsense.

instead of you, Châteauroy; like lightning in a charge; and yet the very man for a dangerous bit of secret service that wants the softness of a panther. We all let our tongues go too much, but he says so little—just a word here, a word there,—when one's wanted—no more; and he's the devil's own to fight."

The Marquis heard the praise of his Corporal, knitting his heavy brows; it was evident the private was no favorite with him.

"The fellow rides well enough," he said, with an affectation of carelessness; "there—for what I see—is the end of his marvels. I wish you had him, Claude, with all my soul."

"Oh hè!" cried Chanrellon, wiping the Rhenish off his tawny moustaches, "he should have been a captain by this if I had. Morbleu! he is a splendid sabreur—kills as many men to his own sword as I could myself, when it comes to a hand in hand fight; breaks horses in like magic; rides them like the wind; has a hawk's eye over open country; obeys like clock-work; what more can you want?"

"Obeys! yes," said the Colonel of Chasseurs, with a snarl. "He'd obey without a word if you ordered him to walk up to a cannon's mouth, and be blown from it; but he gives you such a d—d languid *grand seigneur** glance as he listens that one would think he commanded the regiment."

"But he's very popular with your men too?"

"Monsieur, the worst quality a Corporal can have. His idea of maintaining discipline is to treat them to cognac and give them tobacco."

"Pardieu! not a bad way either with our French fire-

* Fine gentleman.

eaters. *Il connaît son monde; ce brave.** Your squadrons would go to the devil after him."

The Colonel gave a grim laugh.

"I dare say nobody knows the way better."

Cigarette, flirting with the other officers, drinking champagne by great glassfuls, eating bonbons from one, sipping another's soup, pulling the limbs of a succulent ortolan to pieces with a relish, and devouring truffles with all the zest of a bon-vivant, did not lose a word, and catching the inflection of Châteauroy's voice, settled with her own thoughts that "Bel-à-faire-peur" had not a fair field or a smooth course with his Colonel. The weather-cock heart of the little "Friend of the Flag" veered round, with her sex's common custom, to the side that was the weakest.

"Dieu de Dieu, M. le Colonel!" she cried, while she ate M. le Colonel's *foie gras* with as little ceremony and as much enjoyment as would be expected from a young plunderer accustomed to think a meal all the better spiced by being stolen "by the rules of war,"—"whatever else your handsome Corporal is, he is an aristocrat. Ah, ah, I know the aristocrats—I do! Their touch is so gentle, and their speech is so soft, and they have no slang of the camp, and yet they are such *diablotins* to fight and eat steel, and die laughing all so quiet and nonchalant. Give me the aristocrats—the real thing, you know. Not the ginger-cakes, just gilt, that are ashamed of being honest bread—but the old blood like Bel-à-faire-peur."

The Colonel laughed, but restlessly; the little ingrate had aimed at a sore point in him. He was of the First Empire Nobility, and he was weak enough, though a fierce, dauntless, iron-nerved soldier, to be discontented

* He knows them he has to deal with,—that brave fellow.

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with the great fact that his father had been a hero of the Army of Italy, and scarce inferior in genius to Massena, because impatient of the minor one that, before strapping on a knapsack to have his first taste of war under Custine, the Marshal had been but a postillion at a posting inn in the heart of the Nivernais.

"Ah, my brunette!" he answered with a rough laugh, "have you taken my popular Corporal for your lover? You should give your old friends warning first, or he may chance to get an ugly spit on a sabre."

The Amie du Drapeau tossed off her sixth glass of champagne. She felt for the first time in her life a flush of hot blood on her brown clear cheek, well used as she was to such jests and such lovers as these.

"Ma foi!" she said coolly. "He would be more likely to spit than be spitted if it came to a duel. I should like to see him in a duel; there is not a prettier sight in the world when both men have science. As for fighting for me! Morbleu! I will thank nobody to have the impudence to do it, unless I order them out. Coqueline got shot for me, you remember;—he was a pretty fellow, Coqueline, and they killed him so clumsily, that they disfigured him terribly—it was quite a pity. I said then I would have no more handsome men fight about me. *You* may, if you like, M. le Faucon Noir."*

Which title she gave with a saucy laugh, hitting with a chocolate bonbon the black African-burnt visage of the omnipotent chief she had the audacity to attack. High or low, they were all the same to Cigarette. She would have "slanged" the Emperor himself with the self-same coolness, and the Army had given her a passport of immunity so wide, that it would have fared ill with any

* Black Hawk.

one who had ever attempted to bring the vivandière to book for her uttermost mischief.

"By-the-way!" she went on, quick as thought, with her reckless devil-may-care gaiety. "One thing!—Your Corporal will demoralise the Army of Africa, m'sieu?"

"Eh? He shall have an ounce of cold lead before he does. What in?"

"He will demoralise it," said Cigarette, with a sagacious shake of her head. "If they follow his example we sha'n't have a Chasseur, or a Spahis, or a Pioupiou, or a Sapeur worth anything——"

"Sacré! What does he do?" The Colonel's strong teeth bit savagely through his cigar; he would have given much to have been able to find a single thing of insubordination or laxity of duty in a soldier who irritated and annoyed him, but who obeyed him implicitly, and was one of the most brilliant "fire-eaters" of his regiment.

"He won't only demoralise the army," pursued Cigarette, with vivacious eloquence, "but if his example is followed, he'll ruin the Préfets, close the Bureaux, destroy the Exchequer, beggar all the officials, make African life as tame as milk and water, and rob *you*, M. le Colonel, of your very highest and dearest privilege!"

"Sacrebleu!" cried her hearers, as their hands instinctively sought their swords, "what does he do?"

Cigarette looked at them out of her arch black lashes.

"Why, *he never thieves from the Arabs!* If the fashion come in, adieu to our occupation. Court-martial him, Colonel!"

With which sally Cigarette thrust her pretty soft curls back off her temples, and launched herself into lansquenet

with all the ardor of a gambler and the vivacity of a child, her eyes flashing, her cheeks flushing, her little teeth set, her whole soul in the whirl of the game, made all the more riotous by the peals of laughter from her comrades, and the wines that were washed down like water. Cigarette was a terrible little gamester, and had gaming made very easy to her, for it was the creed of the Army that her losses never counted, but her gains were paid to her often double or treble. Indeed, so well did she play, and so well did the goddess of hazard favor her, that she might have grown a millionaire on the fruits of her dice and her cards, but for this fact, that whatever the little Friend of the Flag had in her hands one hour, was given away the next, to the first wounded soldier, or ailing veteran, or needy Arab woman that required the charity.

As much gold was showered on her as on Isabel of the Jockey Club; but Cigarette was never the richer for it. "Bah!" she would say, when they told her of her heedlessness, "money is like a mill, no good standing still. Let it turn, turn, turn, as fast as ever it can, and the more bread will come from it for the people to eat."

The vivandière was by instinct a fine political economist.

Meanwhile where she had left him among the stones of the ruined mosque, the Chasseur, whom they nicknamed Bel-à-faire-peur, in a double sense, because of his "woman's face," as Tata Leroux termed it, and because of the terror his sword had become through North Africa, sat motionless with his right arm resting on his knee, and his spurred heel thrust into the sand, the sun shining down unheeded in its fierce burning glare on the chestnut masses of his beard, and the bright glitter of his uniform.

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He was a dashing cavalry soldier, who had had a dozen wounds cut over his body by the Bedouin swords, in many and hot skirmishes; who had waited through sultry African nights for the lion's tread, and had fought the desert-king and conquered; who had ridden a thousand miles over the great sand waste, and the boundless arid plains, and slept under the stars with the saddle beneath his head, and his rifle in his hand, all through the night; who had served, and served well, in fierce, arduous, unremitting work, in trying campaigns and in close discipline; who had blent the *verve*, the brilliance, the daring, the eat-drink-and-enjoy-for-to-morrow-we-die of the French Chasseur, with something that was very different, and much more tranquil.

Yet, though as bold a man as any enrolled in the French Service, he sat alone here in the shadow of the column, thoughtful, motionless, lost in silence.

In his left hand was a *Galignani*, six months old, and his eyes rested on a line in the obituary:

"On the 10th ult., at Royallieu, suddenly, the Right Hon. Denzil, Viscount Royallieu; aged 90."

CHAPTER XVI.

Cigarette en Bacchante.

VANITAS vanitatum! The dust of death lies over the fallen altars of Bubastis, where once all Egypt came down the flood of glowing Nile, and Herodotus mused under the shadowy foliage, looking on the lake-like rings of water. The Temple of the Sun, where the beauty of Asenath beguiled the Israelite to forget his sale into bondage and banishment, lies in shapeless hillocks, over which canter the mules of dragomen and chatter the

tongues of tourists. Where the Lutetian Palace of Julian saw the Legions rush, with torches and with wine-bowls, to salute their darling as Augustus, the sledge-hammer and the stucco of the Haussmann fiat bear desolation in their wake. Levantine dice are rattled, where Hypatia's voice was heard. Bills of exchange are trafficked in, where Cleopatra wandered under the palm aisles of her rose gardens. Drummers roll their caserne-calls, where Drusus fell and Sulla laid down dominion.

And here—in the land of Hannibal, in the conquest of Scipio, in the Phœnicia, whose loveliness used to flash in the burning, sea-mirrored sun, while her fleets went eastward and westward for the honey of Athens and the gold of Spain—here Cigarette danced the cancan!

An *auberge** of the *barrière* swung its sign of the *As de Pique*, where feathery palms once had waved above mosques of snowy gleam, with marble domes and jewelled arabesques, and the hush of prayer under columned aisles. "*Débits de vin, liqueurs, et tabac*,"** was written, where once verses of the Koran had been blazoned by reverent hands along porphyry cornices and capitals of jasper. A Café Chantant reared its impudent little roof, where once, far back in the dead cycles, Phœnician warriors had watched the galleys of the gold-haired favorite of the gods bear down to smite her against whom the one unpardonable sin of rivalry to Rome was quoted.

The riot of a Paris guinguette was heard, where once the tent of Belisarius might have been spread above the majestic head that towered in youth above the tempestuous seas of Gothic armies, as when, silvered with age, it rose as a rock against the onsweeping flood of Bulgarian

* Little hostelry.

** Here are sold wine, liquors, and tobacco.

hordes. The grisette charms of little tobacconists, milliners, flower-girls, lemonade-sellers, bonbon-sellers, and filles de joie flaunted themselves in the gas-light, where the lustrous sorceress eyes of Antonina might have glanced over the Afric Sea, while her wanton's heart, so strangely filled with leonine courage and shameless licence, heroism and brutality, cruelty and self-devotion, swelled under the purples of her delicate vest, at the glory of the man she at once dishonored and adored.

Vanitas vanitatum! Under the thirsty soil, under the ill-paved streets, under the arid turf, the Legions lay dead, with the Carthaginians they had borne down under the mighty pressure of their phalanx; and the Byzantine ranks were dust side by side with the soldiers of Gelimer. And here, above the graves of two thousand years, the little light feet of Cigarette danced joyously in that triumph of the Living, who never remember that they also are dancing onward to the tomb.

It was a low-roofed, white-plastered, gaudily-decked, smoke-dried mimicry of the guinguettes beyond Paris. The long room, that was an imitation of the Salle de Mars on a Lilliputian scale, had some bunches of lights flaring here and there, and had its walls adorned with laurel wreaths, stripes of tri-colored paint, vividly-colored medallions of the Second Empire, and a little pink gauze flourished about it, that flashed into brightness under the jets of flame—trumpery, yet trumpery which, thanks to the instinct of the French esprit, harmonized, and did not vulgarize; a gift French instinct alone possesses. The floor was bare and well polished; the air, full of tobacco smoke, wine fumes, brandy odors, and an overpowering scent of oil, garlic, and *pot au feu*. Riotous music pealed through it, that even in its clamor kept a certain silvery ring, a certain rhythmical cadence. Pipes were smoked,

barrack slang, camp slang, barrière slang, temple slang, were chattered volubly. Theresa's songs were sung by bright-eyed sallow-cheeked Parisiennes, and chorused by the lusty lungs of Zouaves and Turcos. Good humor prevailed, though of a wild sort; the mad gallop of the Rigolboche had just flown round the room, like lightning, to the crash and the tumult of the most headlong music that ever set spurred heels stamping and grisettes' heels flying: and now, where the crowds of soldiers and women stood back to leave her a clear place, Cigarette was dancing alone.

She had danced the cancan; she had danced since sunset; she had danced till she had tired out cavalrymen, who could go days and nights in the saddle without a sense of fatigue, and made Spahis cry quarter, who never gave it by any chance in the battle-field; and she was dancing now like a little Bacchante, as fresh as if she had just sprung up from a long summer day's rest. Dancing as she would dance only now and then, when caprice took her, and her wayward vivacity was at its height, on the green space before a tent full of general officers, on the bare floor of a barrack-room, under the canvas of a fête-day's booth, or as here, in the music-hall of a Café.

Marshals had more than once essayed to bribe the famous little Friend of the Flag to dance for them, and had failed: but, for a set of soldiers, war-worn, dust-covered, weary with toil and stiff with wounds, she would do it, till they forgot their ills, and got as intoxicated with it as with champagne. For her *gros bébées*, if they were really in want of it, she would do anything. She would flout a star-covered general, box the ears of a brilliant aid, send killing missiles of slang at a dandy of a regiment de famille, and refuse point-blank a Russian

grand duke; but to "*mes enfans*," as she was given to calling the rough tigers and grisly veterans of the Army of Africa, Cigarette was never capricious, however mischievously she would rally, or contemptuously would rate them, when they deserved it.

And she was dancing for them now.

Her soft short curls all fluttering, her cheeks all bright with a scarlet flush, her eyes as black as night, and full of fire, her gay little uniform, with its scarlet and purple, making her look like a fuschia bell tossed by the wind to and fro, ever so lightly, on its delicate swaying stem, Cigarette danced with the wild grace of an Almeh, of a Bayadère, of a Nautch girl, as untutored and instinctive in her as its song to a bird, as its swiftness to a chamois. To see Cigarette was like drinking light fiery wines, whose intoxication was gay as mischief, and sparkling as themselves. All the warmth of Africa, all the wit of France, all the bohemianism of the Flag, all the caprices of her sex, were in that bewitching dancing. Flashing, fluttering, circling, whirling, glancing like a sabre's gleam, tossing like a flower's head, bounding like an antelope, launching like an arrow, darting like a falcon, skimming like a swallow; then for an instant resting as indolently, as languidly, as voluptuously, as a water-lily rests on the water's breast;—Cigarette *en Bacchante* no man could resist.

When once she abandoned herself to the afflatus of that dance delirium, she did with her beholders what she would. The famous Cachucha, that made the reverend cardinals of Spain fling off their pontifical vestments, and surrender themselves to the witchery of the castanets and the gleam of the white twinkling feet, was never more irresistible, more enchanting, more full of

wild, soft, bizarre, delicious grace. It was a poem of motion and color, an ode to Venus and Bacchus.

All her heart was in it—that heart of a girl and a soldier, of a hawk and a kitten, of a Bohemian and an epicurean, of a Lascar and a child, which beat so brightly and so boldly under the dainty gold aiglettes, with which she laced her dashing little uniform.

In the Chambrée of Zephyrs, among the Douars of Spahis, on sandy soil under African stars, above the heaped plunder brought in from a razzia, in the yellow light of candles fastened to bayonets stuck in the earth at a bivouac, on the broad deal table of a barrack-room full of black-browed *conscrits indigènes*,* amid the thundering echoes of the Marseillaise des Bataillons shouted from the brawny chests of Zouaves, Cigarette had danced, danced, danced, till her whole vivacious life seemed pressed into one hour, and all the mirth and mischief of her little brigand's soul seemed to have found their utterance in those tiny, slender, spurred, and restless feet, that never looked to touch the earth which they lit on lightly as a bird alights, only to leave it afresh, with wider, swifter bound, with ceaseless airy flight.

So she danced now, in the cabaret of the As de Pique. She had a famous group of spectators, not one of whom knew how to hold himself back from springing in to seize her in his arms, and whirl with her down the floor. But it had been often told them by experience, that, unless she beckoned one out, a blow of her clinched hand and a cessation of her impromptu *pas de seul*, would be the immediate result. Her spectators were renowned *croque-mitaines;* men, whose names rang like

* Conscripts drawn from the native population.

trumpets in the ear of Kabyle and Marabout; men who had fought under the noble colors of the day of Mazagran, or had cherished or emulated its traditions; men who had the salient features of all the varied species that make up the soldiers of Africa.

There was Ben Arslan, with his crimson burnous wrapped round his towering stature, from whom Moor and Jew fled, as before a pestilence, the fiercest, deadliest, most voluptuous of all the Spahis;* brutalized in his drink, merciless in his loves; all an Arab when once back in the desert, with a blow of a scabbard his only payment for forage, and a thrust of his sabre his only apology to husbands, but to the service a slave, and in the combat a lion.

There was Beau-Bruno, a dandy of Turcos,** whose snowy turban and olive beauty bewitched half the women of Algeria, who himself affected to neglect his conquests, with a supreme contempt for those indulgences, but who would have been led out and shot rather than forego the personal adornings, for which his adjutant and his *capitaine du bureau* growled unceasing wrath at him with every day that shone.

There was Pouffer-de-Rire, a little Tringlo,*** the wittiest, gayest, happiest, sunniest-tempered droll in all the army, who would sing the camp-songs so joyously through a burning march, that the whole of the battalions would break into one refrain as with one throat, and press on laughing, shouting, running, heedless of thirst, or heat, or famine, and as full of monkey-like jests as any gamins.

There was En-ta-maboull,† so nicknamed from his

* Arab cavalry. ** Native nfantry.

*** Soldier of the commissariat and of the baggage-trains.

† Est-ce que tu es fou? in ordinary French.

love for that unceremonious slang phrase—a Zouave who had the history of a Gil Blas, and the talent of a Crichton, the morals of an Abruzzi brigand, and the wit of a Falstaff; aquiline-nosed, eagle-eyed, black-skinned as an African, with adventures enough in his life to outvie Munchhausen, with a purse always *pleine de vide*,* as the camp sentence runs; who thrust his men through the body as coolly as others kill wasps; who roasted a shepherd over a camp-fire for contumacy in concealing Bedouin whereabouts; yet who would pawn his last shirt at the bazaar to help a comrade in debt, and had once substituted himself for, and received fifty blows on the loins in the stead of, his sworn friend, whom he loved with that love of David for Jonathan, which, in Caserne life, is readier found than in Club life.

There was Pattes-du-Tigre, a small wiry supple-limbed fire-eater, with a skin like a coal and eyes that sparkled like the live coal's flame, a veteran of the Joyeux, who could discipline his roughs as a sheep-dog his lambs, and who had one curt martial law for his detachment, brief as Draco's, and trimmed to suit either an attack on the enemy or the chastisement of an *indiscipliné*,** lying in one simple word—"Fusillez."***

There was Barbe-Grise, a grisly *ancien*† of Zephyrs, who held the highest repute of any in his battalion for rushing on to a foe with a foot speed that could equal the canter of an Arab's horse; for having stood alone once the brunt of thirty Bedouins' attack, and ended by beating them back, though a dozen spear-heads were launched into his body, and his *pantalons garances* were filled with his own blood; and for framing a matchless system of night plunder that swept the country bare as a

* Penniless.
** A mutineer.
*** Fire!
† Veteran.

table-rock in an hour, and made the colons surrender every hidden treasure, from a pot of gold to a hen's eggs, from a cauldron of couscoussou to a tom-cat.

There was Alcide Echauffourées, also a Zephyr,* who had his nickname from the marvellous changes of costume with which he would pursue his erratic expedition, and deceive the very Arabs themselves into believing him a born Mussulman; a very handsome fellow, the Lauzun of his battalion, the Brummel of his Caserne; *coquette* with his képi on one side of his graceful head, and his moustaches soft as a lady's hair, whose paradise was a score of dangerous intrigues, and whose seventh heaven was a duel with an infuriated husband; incorrigibly lazy, but with the Italian laziness, as of the panther who sleeps in the sun, and with such episodes of romance, mischief, love, and devilry in his twenty-five years of existence as would leave behind them all the invention of Dumas, *père ou fils*.

All these and many more like them were the spectators of Cigarette's ballet, applauding with the wild hurrah of the desert, with the clashing of spurs, with the thunder of feet, with the demoniac shrieks of irrepressible adoration and delight.

And every now and then her bright eyes would flash over the ring of familiar faces, and glance from them with an impatient disappointment as she danced; her *gros bébées* were not enough for her. She wanted a Chasseur with white hands and a grave smile to be among them; and she shook back her curls, and flushed angrily as she noted his absence, and went on with the pirouettes, the circling flights, the wild resistless abandonment of her inspirations, till she was like a little desert-hawk that is intoxicated with the scent of prey borne down upon the

* Zephyr is a name given to the "Battalion of the Rebellious" in Algeria.

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wind, and wheeling like a mad thing in the transparent ether and the hot sun-glow.

L'As de Pique was the especial estaminet of the *chasses-marais*. He was in the house; she knew it; had she not seen him drinking with some others, or rather paying for all but taking little himself, just as she entered? He was in the house, this mysterious Bel-à-faire-peur—and was not here to see her dance! Not here to see the darling of the Douars; the pride of every Chacal, Zephyr, and Chasseur in Africa; the Amie du Drapeau who was adored by every one, from Chefs de Bataillons to *fantassins*, and toasted by every drinker, from Algiers to Oran, in the Champagne of Messrs. les Généraux as in the Cric of the Loustics round a camp-fire!

He was not there; he was leaning over the little wooden ledge of a narrow window in an inner room, from which one by one, some Spahis and some troopers of his own *tribu*,* with whom he had just been drinking such burgundies and brandies as the place could give, had sloped away one by one under the irresistible attraction of the vivandière. An attraction, however, that had not seduced them till all the bottles were emptied, bottles more in number and higher in cost than was prudent in a corporal who had but his pay, and that scant enough, to keep himself, and who had known what it was to find a roll of white bread and a cup of coffee a luxury beyond all reach, and to have to *faire la lessive*** up to the last thing in his haversack to buy a toss of thin wine when he was dying of thirst, or a slice of melon when he was parching with African fever.

But prudence had at no time been his specialty, and the reckless life of Algeria was not one to teach it, with

* Squadron.

** Sell his whole effects

its frank brotherly fellowship that bound the soldiers of each battalion, or each squadron, so closely in a fraternity of which every member took as freely as he gave; its gay, careless carpe diem camp-philosophy, the unconscious philosophy of men who enjoyed heart and soul if they had a chance, because they knew they might be shot dead before another day broke; and its swift and vivid changes that made tirailleurs and troopers one hour rich as a king in loot, in wine, in dark-eyed captives at the sacking of a tribe, to be the next day famished, scorched, dragging their weary limbs, or urging their sinking horses through endless sand and burning heat, glad to sell a cartouche, if they dared so break regimental orders, or to rifle a hen-roost if they came near one, to get a mouthful of food, changing everything in their haversack for a sup of dirty water, and driven to pay with the thrust of a sabre for a lock of wretched grass to keep their beasts alive through the sickliness of a sirocco.

All these taught no caution to any nature normally without it; and the chief thing that his regiment had loved in him whom they named Bel-à-faire-peur from the first day that he had bound his red waist-sash about his loins, and the officers of the bureau had looked over the new volunteer murmuring admiringly in their teeth "*Ce gaillard ira loin!*"* had been that all he had was given, free as the winds, to any who asked or needed.

The all was slender enough. Unless he live by the ingenuity of his own manufactures, or by thieving or intimidating the people of the country, a French soldier has but barren fare and a hard struggle with hunger and poverty; and it was the one murmur against him, when he was lowest in the ranks, that he would never follow

* "This gallant will do great things!"

the fashion, in wringing out by force or threat the possessions of the native population. The one reproach, that made his fellow-*lascars** impatient and suspicious of him, was that he refused any share in those rough arguments of blows and lunges with which they were accustomed to persuade every victim they came nigh to yield them up all such treasures of food, or drink, or riches, from sheep's liver and couscoussou, to Morocco carpets and skins of brandy and coins hid in the sand, that the Arabs might be so unhappy as to own in their reach. That the fattest pullet of the poorest Bedouin was as sacred to him as the banquet of his own Chef d'Escadron, let him be ever so famished after the longest day's march, was an eccentricity, and an insult to the usages of the corps, for which not even his daring and his popularity could wholly procure him pardon.

But this defect in him was counterbalanced by the lavishness with which his *décompte*** was lent, given, or spent in the very moment of its receipt. If a man of his *tribu* wanted anything, he knew that Bel-à-faire-peur would offer his last sou to aid him, or, if money were all gone, would sell the last trifle he possessed to the Riz-pain-sels,*** to get enough to assist his comrade. It was a virtue which went far to vouch for all others in the view of his lawless, open-handed brethren of the Chambrée† and the Camp, and made them forgive him many moments, when the mood of silence and the habit of solitude, not uncommon with him, would otherwise have incensed a fraternity with whom "*tu fais suisse!*"†† is the deadliest charge, and the sentence of excommunication against any who dare to provoke it.

* Soldiers. ** Pay.
*** Working-soldiers of the administration.
† Sleeping-room in a barrack. †† You live alone, or apart.

One of those moods was on him now.

He had had a drinking bout with the men, who had left him, and had laughed as gaily and as carelessly, if not as riotously, as any of them at the wild mirth, the unbridled licence, the amatory recitations, and the Bacchic odes in their lawless *sapir*, that had ushered the night in while his wines unlocked the tongues and flowed down the throats of the fierce Arab-Spahis and the French cavalry-men. But now he leant out of the pent-up casement, with his arms folded on the sill and a short pipe in his teeth, thoughtful and solitary after the orgie, whose heavy fumes and clouds of smoke still hung heavily on the air within.

The window looked on a little, dull, close court-yard, where the yellow leaves of a withered gourd trailed drearily over the gray uneven stones. The clamor of the applause and the ring of the music from the dancing-hall echoed with a whirling din in his ear, and made, in sharper stranger contrast, the quiet of the narrow court with its strip of starry sky above its four high walls.

He leaned there musing and grave, hearing little of the noise about him; there was always noise of some sort in the clangor and tumult of barrack or bivouac life, and he had grown to heed it no more than he heeded the roar of desert beasts about him, when he slept in the desert or the hills; but looking dreamily out at the little shadowy square, with the sear gourd leaves and the rough misshapen stones. His present and his future were neither much brighter than the gloomy walled-in den on which he gazed.

Twelve years before, when he had been ordered into the *champ de manœuvre** for the first time, to see of what mettle he was made, the instructor had watched him with

* Exercise-ground.

amazed eyes, muttering to himself, "*Tiens! ce n'est pas un 'bleu'—ceci!** What a rider! Dieu de Dieu! he knows more than we can teach. He has served before now—served in some emperor's picked guard!"

And when he had passed from the exercising-ground to the campaign, the Army had found in him one of the most splendid of its many splendid soldiers; and in the *folios matricules*** there was no page of achievements, of exploits, of services, of dangers, that showed a more brilliant array of military deserts than his. Yet, for many years, he had been passed by unnoticed: he had now not even the cross on his chest, and he had only slowly and with infinite difficulty been promoted so far as he stood now—a Corporal in the Chasseurs d'Afrique—a step only just accorded him because wounds innumerable and distinctions without number in countless skirmishes had made it impossible to cast him wholly aside any longer.

The cause lay in the implacable enmity of one man—his Chief.

Far-sundered as they were by position, and rarely as they could come in actual contact, that merciless weight of animosity from the great man to his soldier, had laid on the other like iron, and clogged him from all advancement. His thoughts were of it now. Only to-day, at an inspection, the accidentally-broken saddle-girth of a boy-conscript had furnished pretext for a furious reprimand, a volley of insolent opprobrium hurled at himself, under which he had had to sit mute in his saddle, with no other sign that he was human beneath the outrage than the blood that would, despite himself, flush the pale bronze of his forehead. His thoughts were on it now.

* "Whew! This is no raw recruit,—this fellow!"

** Daily register of the troopers' conduct.

"There are many losses that are bitter enough," he mused; "but there is not one so bitter as the loss of the right *to resent!*"

A whirlwind of laughter, so loud that it drowned the music of the shrill violins and thundering drums, echoed through the rooms and shook him from his reverie.

"They are *bons enfans*," he thought, with a half smile, as he listened; "they are more honest in their mirth, as in their wrath, than we ever were in that old world of mine."

Amid the shouts, the crash, the tumult, the gay ringing voice of Cigarette rose distinct. She had apparently paused in her dancing to exchange one of those passes of arms which were her specialty, in the Sabir that she, a child of the regiments of Africa, had known as her mother tongue.

"*Il fait suisse?*" she cried, disdainfully. "*Paf! et tu as bu de sa gourde, chenapan?*"*

The grumbled assent of the accused was inaudible.

"*Ingrat!*" pursued the scornful, triumphant voice of the Vivandière; "you would *bazarder*** your mother's grave-clothes! You would eat your children, *en fricassée!* You would sell your father's bones for a draught of *tord-boyaud!**** *Va t'en, chien!*"

The screams of mirth redoubled; Cigarette's style of withering eloquence was suited to all her auditors' tastes, and, under the chorus of laughs at his cost, her infuriated adversary plucked up courage and roared forth a defiance.

"*Ma cantche!* white hands and a brunette's face are

* You call him a misanthrope? and you have been drinking at his expense, you rascal?

** Pawn.

*** Brandy.

fine things for a soldier. He kills women—he kills women with his lady's grace! *Grand' chose ça!*"

"He does not pull their ears to make them give him their *style*,* and beat them with a *matraque*** if they don't fry his eggs fast enough, as you do, Barbe-Grise," retorted the contemptuous tones of the champion of the absent. "White hands, morbleu! Well, his hands are not always in other people's pockets as yours are, *sacripant!*"

This forcible *tu quoque* recrimination is in high relish in the Caserne; the screams of mirth redoubled; Barbe-Grise was a redoubtable authority whom the wildest dare-devil in his brigade dared not contradict, and he was getting the worst of it under the lash of Cigarette's tongue, to the infinite glee of the whole ball-room.

"Damn!—his hands cannot work as mine can!" growled her opponent.

"Oh, ho!" cried the little lady, with supreme disdain; "they don't twist cocks' throats and skin rabbits they have thieved, perhaps, like yours, but they would wring your neck before breakfast to get an appetite, if they could touch such *canaille*."

"*Canaille?*" thundered the insulted Barbe-Grise; "*Ma cantche!* if you were but a man!"

"What would you do to me, *brigand?*" screamed Cigarette, in fits of laughter; "give me fifty blows of a *matraque*, as your officers gave you last week for stealing his *jambon****** from the *blanc bec?*"†

A growl like a lion from the badgered Barbe-Grise shook the walls; she had cast her mischievous stroke at him on a very sore point, the unhappy young conscript's

* Money.
** Stick.
*** Gun.
† Newly joined soldier.

rifle having been first dextrously thieved from him, and then as dextrously sold to an Arab.

"Sacrebleu!" he roared; "you are in love, *au grand galop*, with this *Vainqueur des belles**—this *loustic aristocrat!*"**

The only answer to this unbearable insult was a louder tumult of laughter; a crash, a splash, and a volley of oaths from Barbe-Grise. Cigarette had launched a bottle of vin ordinaire at him, blinded his eyes, and drenched his beard with the red torrent and the shower of glass shivers, and was back again dancing like a little Bacchante, and singing at the top of her sweet lark-like voice—

Turcos! Lignards!
Bon Zigs! Truffards!
Autour des couscoussous,
Sont tous mes chers zou-zous!
Roumis
Spahis
Même les Arbis,
Joyeux
Et Bleus,
Même les Recrues,
Ont pour moi
Quand on boit
L'air des rois,
L'air des rois!
A mon cœur le chemin
N'est qu' par le vin!
Le bidon qu'on savoure
Est le titre à m'amour!

With which doggerel declaration of her own mercenary and cosmopolitan sentiments chanted in Sabir slang, the little Friend of the Flag resumed her wildest bounds and her most airy fantasias. At the sound of the animated altercation, not knowing but what one of his own troopers

* Conqueror of women.

** Soldier-fine gentleman.

might be the delinquent, he who leaned out of the little casement moved forward to the doorway of the dancing-room; he did not guess that it was himself whom she had defended against the onslaught of the Zephyr, Barbe-Grise.

His height rose far above the French soldiers, and above most even of the lofty-statured Spahis, and her rapid glance flashed over him at once. "Did he hear?" she wondered; the scarlet flush of exercise and excitement deepened on her clear brown cheek, that had never blushed at the coarsest jests or the broadest love words of the barrack-life that had been about her ever since her eyes first opened in their infancy to laugh at the sun-gleam on a cuirassier's corslet among the baggage-waggons that her mother followed. She thought he had not heard; his face was grave, a little weary, and his gaze, as it fell on her, was abstracted.

"Oh-hè! *Beau Roumi!*" thought Cigarette, with a flash of hot wrath superseding her momentary and most rare embarrassment. "You are looking at me and not thinking of me? We will soon change that!"

Such an insult she had never been subjected to, from the first day when she had danced for sweetmeats on the top of a great drum when she was three years old, in the middle of a circular camp of Tirailleurs. It sent fresh nerve into her lithe limbs, it made her eyes flash like so much fire, it gave her a millionfold more grace, more abandon, more heedlessness, more piqued and reckless *désinvoltur*e. She stamped her tiny, spurred foot petulantly.

"Plus vîte! Plus vîte!"* she cried; and as the musician obeyed her, she whirled, she spun, she bounded, she seemed to live in air, while her soft curls blew off her

* "Quicker! quicker!"

brow, and her white teeth glanced, and her cheeks glowed with a carmine glow, and the little gold aiglettes broke across her chest with the beating of her heart that throbbed like a bird's heart when it is wild with the first breath of Spring.

She had pitted herself against him; and she won—so far.

The vivacity, the impetuosity, the antelope elegance, the voluptuous repose that now and then broke the ceaseless, sparkling movement of her dancing, caught his eyes, and fixed them on her; it was bewitching, and it bewitched him for the moment; he watched her as in other days he had watched the fantastic witcheries of eastern almè, and the ballet charms of opera dancers.

This young Bohemian of the Barrack danced in the dusky glare and the tavern fumes of the As de Pique to a set of soldiers in their shirt-sleeves with their short black pipes in their mouths, with as matchless a grace as ever the first *ballerina** of Europe danced before sovereigns and dukes on the boards of Paris, Vienna, or London. It was the eastern *bamboula* of the Harems, to which was added all the elastic joyance, all the gay brilliancy of the blood of France.

Suddenly she lifted both her hands above her head.

"*A moi, Roumis!*"

It was the signal well known, the signal of permission to join in that wild vertigo for which every one of her spectators was panting; their pipes were flung away, their képis tossed off their heads, the music clashed louder and faster, and more fiery with every sound, the chorus of the Marseillaise des Bataillons thundered from a hundred voices—they danced as only men can dance

* Dancing girls.

who serve under the French flag, and live under the African sun. Two, only, still looked on—the Chasseur d'Afrique, and a veteran of the 10th company, lamed for life at Mazagran.

"*En ta maboull? Tu ne danses pas—toi?*"* muttered the veteran Zephyr to his silent companion.

The Chasseur turned and smiled a little.

"I prefer a *bamboula* whose music is the cannon, *bon père.*"

"Bravo! Yet she is pretty enough to tempt you?"

"Yes; too pretty to be unsexed by such a life."

His thoughts went to a woman he had loved well, a young Arab, with eyes like the softness of dark waters, who had fallen to him once in a razzia as his share of spoil, and for whom he had denied himself cards, or wine, or tobacco, or an hour at the Café, or anything that alleviated the privation and severity of his lot as "*simple soldat*," which he had been then, that she might have such few and slender comforts as he could give her from his miserable pay. She was dead. Her death had been the darkest passage in his life in Africa—but the flute-like music of her voice seemed to come on his ear now. This girl-soldier had little charm for him after the sweet, silent, tender grace of his lost Zelme.

He turned and touched on the shoulder a Chasseur who had paused a moment to get breath in the headlong whirl:

"Come, we are to be with the Djied by dawn!"

The trooper obeyed instantly; they were ordered to visit and remain with a Bedouin camp some thirty miles away on the naked plateau; a camp professedly submissive, but not so much so but that the Bureau deemed it

* "Are you a stupid? Don't you dance—eh?"

well to profit themselves by the services of the corporal, whose knowledge of Arabic, whose friendship with the tribes, and whose superior intelligence in all such missions rendered him peculiarly fitted for errands that required diplomacy and address as well as daring and fire.

He went thoughtfully out of the noisy, reeking ball-room into the warm lustre of the Algerian night; as he went, Cigarette, who had been nearer than he knew, flashed full in his eyes the fury of her own sparkling ones, while with a contemptuous laugh she struck him across the lips with the cigar she hurled at him.

"Unsexed? Pouf! If you have a woman's face, may I not have a man's soul? It is only a fair exchange. I am no kitten, *bon zig;* take care of my talons!"

The words were spoken with the fierceness of Africa; she had too much in her of the spirit of the Zephyrs and the Chacals, with whom her youth had been spent from her cradle up, not to be dangerous when roused; she was off at a bound, and in the midst of the mad whirl again before he could attempt to soften or efface the words she had overheard, and the last thing he saw of her was in a cloud of Zouaves and Spahis with the wild *tintamarre** of the music shaking riotous echoes from the rafters.

But when he had passed out of sight, Cigarette shook herself free from the dancers with petulant impatience; she was not to be allured by flattery or drawn by entreaty back amongst them; she set her delicate pearly teeth tight, and vowed with a reckless, contemptuous, impetuous oath that she was tired, that she was sick of them, that she was no strolling player to caper for them with a tambourine, and with that declaration made her way out

* Uproar.

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alone into the little open court under the stars, so cool, so still after the heat, and riot, and turbulence within.

There she dropped on a broad stone step, and leant her head on her hand.

"Unsexed! unsexed! What did he mean?" she thought, while for the first time, with a vague sense of his meaning, tears welled hot and bitter into her sunny eyes, while the pained color burned in her face. Those tears were the first that she had ever known, and they were cruel ones, though they lasted but a little time; there was too much fire in the young Bohemian of the Army not to scorch them as they rose. She stamped her foot on the stones passionately, and her teeth were set like a little terrier's as she muttered:

"Unsexed! unsexed! Bah, M'sieu l'Aristocrat! If you think so, you shall find your thought right; you shall find Cigarette can hate as men hate, and take her revenge as soldiers take theirs!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Under the Houses of Hair.

It was just sunset.

The far-off summits of the Djurjura were tinted with the intense glare; the distant pines and cypresses cut sharply against the rose-warmed radiance of the sky. On the slopes of the hills white cupolas and terraced gardens, where the Algerine haouach still showed the taste and luxury of Algerine corsairs, rose up among their wild olive shadows on the groves of the lentiscus. In the deep gorges that were channelled between the riven rocks, the luxuriance of African vegetation ran riot, the feathery crests of tossing reeds, the long floating

leaves of plants, filling the dry water-courses of vanished streams; the broad foliage of the wild fig, and the glowing, dainty blossoms of the oleander, wherever a trace of brook, or pool, or rivulet let it put forth its beautiful coronal, growing one in another in the narrow valleys, and the curving passes, wherever broken earth or rock gave shelter from the blaze and heat of the North African day.

Farther inland the bare, sear stretches of brown plain were studded with the dwarf palm, the vast shadowless plateaux were desolate as the great desert itself far beyond; and the sun, as it burned on them a moment in the glory of its last glow, found them naked and grand by the sheer force of immensity and desolation, but dreary and endless, and broken into refts and chasms, as though to make fairer by their own barren solitude the laughing luxuriance of the sea-face of the Sahel.

A moment, and the lustre of the light flung its own magic brilliancy over the Algerine water-line, and then shone full on the heights of El Biar and Bouzariah, and on the lofty, delicate form of the Italian pines that here and there, Sicilian-like, threw out their graceful heads against the amber sun-glow and the deep azure of the heavens. Then swiftly, suddenly, the sun sank; twilight passed like a gray gliding shade, an instant, over earth and sea; and night, the balmy, sultry, star-studded night of Africa, fell over the thirsty leafage longing for its dews, the closed flowers that slumbered at its touch, the seared and blackened plains to which its coolness could bring no herbage, the massive hills that seemed to lie so calmly in its rest.

Camped on one of the bare stretches above the Mustapha Road was a circle of Arab tents; the circle was irregularly kept, and the Krümas were scattered at will;

here a low one of canvas, there one of goatskin; here a white towering canopy of teleze, there a low striped little nest of shelter, and loftier than all, the stately *beit el shar* of the Sheik, with his standard struck into the earth in front of it, with its heavy folds hanging listlessly in the sultry, breathless air.

The encampment stretched far over the level arid earth, and there was more than one tent where the shadowing folds of the banner marked the abode of some noble Djied. Disorder reigned supreme, in all the desert freedom; horses and mules, goats and camels, tethered, strayed among the conical houses of hair, browsing off the littered straw or the tossed-down hay; and caldrons seethed and hissed over wood fires, whose lurid light was flung on the eagle features and the white haiks of the wanderers who watched the boiling of their mess, or fed the embers with dry sticks. Round other fires, having finished the eating of their couscoussou, the Bedouins lay full length, enjoying the solemn silence which they love so little to break, and smoking their long pipes, while through the shadows about them glided the lofty figures of their brethren, with the folds of their sweeping burnous floating in the gloom. It was a picture. Rembrandt in colour, Oriental in composition, with the darkness surrounding it stretching out into endless distance that led to the mystic silence of the great desert, and above the intense blue of the gorgeous night, with the stars burning through white transparent mists of slowly drifting clouds.

In the central tent, tall and crimson striped, with its mighty standard reared in front, and its opening free to the night, sat the Khalifa, the head of the tribe, with a circle of Arabs about him. He was thrown on his cushions, rich enough for a seraglio, while the rest squatted on the

morocco carpet that covered the bare ground, and that was strewn with round brass Moorish trays, and little cups emptied of their coffee. The sides of the tent were hung with guns and swords, lavishly adorned, and in the middle stood a tall Turkish candle-branch in fretted work, whose light struggled with the white flood of the moon, and the ruddy, fitful glare from a wood fire without.

Beneath its light, which fell full on him, flung down upon another pile of cushions facing the open front of the tent, was a guest whom the Khalifa delighted to honor. Only a Corporal of Chasseurs, and once a foe, yet one with whom the Arab found the brotherhood of brave men, and on whom he lavished, in all he could, the hospitalities and honors of the desert.

The story of their friendship ran thus:

The tribe was now allied with France, or, at least, had accepted French sovereignty, and pledged itself to neutrality in the hostilities still rife; but a few years before, far in the interior and leaged with the Kabaïles, it had been one of the fiercest and most dangerous among the enemies of France. At that time the Khalifa and the Chasseur met in many a skirmish; hot, desperate struggles, where men fought horse to horse, hand to hand; midnight frays, when, in the heart of lonely ravines, Arab ambuscades fell on squadrons of French cavalry; terrible chases through the heat of torrid suns, when the glittering ranks of the charging troops swept down after the Bedouins' flight; fiery combats, when the desert sand and the smoke of musketry circled in clouds above the close-locked struggle, and the Leopard of France and the Lion of Sahara wrestled in a death-grip.

In these, through four or five seasons of warfare, the Sheik and the Chasseur had encountered each other, till

each had grown to look for the other's face as soon as the standards of the Bedouins flashed in the sunshine opposite the guidons of the Imperial forces; till each had watched and noted the other's unmatched prowess, and borne away the wounds of the other's home-strokes, with the admiration of a bold soldier for a bold rival's dauntlessness and skill; till each had learned to long for an hour, hitherto always prevented by waves of battle that had swept them too soon asunder, when they should meet in a duello once for all, and try their strength together till one bore off victory and one succumbed to death.

At last it came to pass that after a lengthened term of this chivalrous antagonism, the tribe was sorely pressed by the French troops, and could no longer mass its fearless front to face them, but had to flee southward to the desert, and encumbered by its flocks and its women, was hardly driven and greatly decimated. Now among those women was one whom the Sheik held above all earthly things except his honor in war, a beautiful antelope-eyed creature, lithe and graceful as a palm, and the daughter of a pure Arab race, on whom he could not endure for any other sight than his own to look, and whom he guarded in his tent as the chief pearl of all his treasures; herds, flocks, arms, even his horses, all save the honor of his tribe, he would have surrendered rather than surrender Djelma. It was a passion with him; a passion that not even the iron of his temper and the dignity of his austere calm could abate or conceal; and the rumor of it and of the beauty of its object reached the French camp, till an impatient curiosity was roused about her, and a raid that should bear her off became the favourite speculation round the picket fires at night, and the scorching noons, when the men lay stripped to their

waist, panting like tired dogs under the hot, withering breath that stole to them from sweeping over the yellow seas of sand.

Their heated fancies had pictured this treasure of the great Djied as something beyond all that her sex had ever given them, and to snare her in some unwary moment was the chief thought of Zephyr and Spahis when they went out on a scouting or foraging party. But it was easier said than done; the eyes of no Frank ever fell on her, and when he was most closely driven the Khalifa Ilderim abandoned his cattle and sheep, but with the females of the tribe still safely guarded, fell more and more backward and southward, drawing the French on and on farther and farther across the plains in the sickliest times of hottest drought.

Reinforcements could swell the Imperial ranks as swiftly as they were thinned, but with the Arabs a man once fallen was a man the less to their numbers for ever, and the lightning-like pursuit began to tell terribly on them; their herds had fallen into their pursuers' hands, and famine menaced them. Nevertheless, they were fierce in attack as tigers, rapid in swoop as vultures, and fought flying in such fashion that the cavalry lost more in this fruitless, worthless work, than they would have done in a second Hohenlinden or Austerlitz.

Moreover, the heat was intense, water was bad and very rare, dysentery came with the scorch and the toil of this endless charge; the chief in command, M. le Marquis de Châteauroy, swore heavily as he saw many of his best men dropping off like sheep in a murrain, and he offered two hundred napoleons to whosoever should bring either the dead Sheik's head or the living beauty of Djelma.

One day the Chasseurs had pitched their camp where

a few barren, withered trees gave a semblance of shelter, and a little thread of brackish water oozed through the yellow earth.

It was high noon; the African sun was at its fiercest; far as the eye could reach there was only one boundless, burning, unendurable glitter of parching sand and cloudless sky, brazen beneath, brazen above, till the desert and the heavens touched, and blent in one tawny fiery glow in the measureless distance. The men lay under canvas, dead beat, half naked, without the power to do anything except to fight like thirst-maddened dogs for a draught at the shallow stream that they and their breathless horses soon drained dry.

Even Raoul de Châteauroy, though his frame was like an Arab's, and knit into Arab endurance, was stretched like a great bloodhound, chained by the sultry oppression. He was ruthless, inflexible, a tyrant to the core, and sharp and swift as steel in his rigor, but he was a fine soldier, and never spared himself any of the hardships that his regiment had to endure under him.

Suddenly the noon lethargy of the camp was broken; a trumpet-call rang through the stillness; against the amber transparency of the horizon line the outlines of half-a-dozen horsemen were seen looming nearer and nearer with every moment; they were some Spahis who had been out "*sondant le terrain aux environs.*"* The mighty frame of Châteauroy, almost as unclothed as an athlete, started from its slumberous, panting rest; his eyes lightened hungrily; he muttered a fiery oath: "Mort de Dieu!—they have the woman!"

They had the woman. She had been netted near a water-spring, to which she had wandered too loosely

* Sweeping the country for food.

guarded, and too far from the Bedouin encampment. The delight of the haughty Sidi's eyes was borne off to the tents of his foes, and the Colonel's face flushed darkly with an eager, lustful warmth, as he looked upon his captive. Rumor had not outboasted the Arab girl's beauty; it was lustrous as ever was that when, far yonder to the eastward, under the curled palms of Nile, the sorceress of the Cæsars swept through her rose-strewn palace-chambers. Only Djelma was as innocent as the gazelle, whose grace she resembled, and loved her lord with a great love.

Of her suffering her captor took no more heed than if she were a young bird dying of shot wounds; but, with one triumphant, admiring glance at her, he wrote a message in Arabic, to send to the Khalifa, ere her loss was discovered—a message more cruel than iron. He hesitated a second, where he lay at the opening of his tent, whom he should send with it. His men were almost all half-dead with the sun-blaze. His glance chanced to light in the distance on a soldier to whom he bore no love—causelessly, but bitterly all the same. He had him summoned, and eyed him with a curious amusement:—Châteauroy treated his squadrons with much the same *sans-façon* familiarity and brutality that a chief of filibusters uses to his.

"So! you heed the heat so little, you give up your turn of water to a drummer, they say?"

The Chasseur gave the salute with a calm deference. A faint flush passed over the sun-bronze of his forehead. He had thought the Sydney-like sacrifice had been unobserved.

"The drummer was but a child, *mon Commandant.*"

"Be so good as to give us no more of those melo-

dramatic acts!" said M. le Marquis, contemptuously. "You are too fond of trafficking in those showy fooleries. You bribe your comrades for their favoritism too openly. Ventrebleu! I forbid it—do you hear?"

"I hear, *mon Colonel.*"

The assent was perfectly tranquil and respectful. He was too good a soldier not to render perfect obedience, and keep perfect silence, under any goad of provocation to break both.

"Obey, then!" said Châteauroy, savagely. "Well, since you love heat so well, you shall take a flag of truce and my scroll to the Sidi Ilderim. But tell me, first, what do you think of this capture?"

"It is not my place to give opinions, M. le Colonel."

"Pardieu! it is your place when I bid you. Speak, or I will have the *matraque* cut the words out of you!"

"I may speak frankly?"

"Ten thousand curses—yes!"

"Then, I think that those who make war on women are no longer fit to fight with men."

For a moment the long, sinewy, massive form of Châteauroy started from the skins on which he lay at full length, like a lion starting from its lair. His veins swelled like black cords; under the mighty muscle of his bare chest his heart beat visibly in the fury of his wrath.

"By God! I have a mind to have you shot like a dog!"

The Chasseur looked at him carelessly, composedly, but with a serene deference still, as due from a soldier to his chief.

"You have threatened it before, M. le Colonel. It may be as well to do it, or the army may think you capricious."

Raoul de Châteauroy crushed a blasphemous oath through his clinched teeth, and laughed a certain short, stern, sardonic laugh, which his men dreaded more than his wrath.

"No; I will send you instead to the Khalifa. He often saves me the trouble of killing my own curs. Take a flag of truce and this paper, and never draw rein till you reach him, if your beast drop dead at the end."

The Chasseur saluted, took the paper, bowed with a certain languid, easy grace that camp life never cured him of, and went. He knew that the man who should take the news of his treasure's loss to the Emir Ilderim would, a thousand to one, perish by every torture desert cruelty could frame, despite the cover of the white banner.

Châteauroy looked after him, as he and his horse passed from the French camp in the full burning tide of noon.

"If the Arabs kill him," he thought, "I will forgive Ilderim five seasons of rebellion."

The Chasseur, as he had been bidden, never drew rein across the scorching plateau. He rode to what he knew was like enough to be death, and death by many a torment, as though he rode to a midnight love-tryst. His horse was of Arab breed—young, fleet, and able to endure extraordinary pressure, both of spur and of heat. He swept on, far and fast, through the sickly, lurid glitter of the day, over the loose sand, that flew in puffs around him as the hoofs struck it flying right and left. At last, ere he reached the Bedouin tents, that were still but slender black points against the horizon, he saw the Sheik and a party of horsemen returning from a foraging quest, and in ignorance as yet of the abduction of Djelma.

He galloped straight to them, and halted across their line of march, with the folds of the little white flag fluttering in the sun. The Bedouins drew bridle, and Ilderim advanced alone. He was a magnificent man, of middle age, with the noblest type of the eagle-eyed, aquiline desert beauty. He was a superb specimen of his race, without the lean, withered, rapacious, vulture look which often mars it. His white haik floated round limbs fit for a colossus; and under the snowy folds of his turban the olive-bronze of his bold forehead, the sweep of his jet black beard, and the piercing luminance of his eyes had a grand and kingly majesty.

A glance of recognition flashed from him on the Lascar, who had so often crossed swords with him; and he waved back the scroll with dignified courtesy.

"Read it me."

It was read. Bitterly, blackly, shameful, the few brutal words were. They netted him as an eagle is netted in a shepherd's trap.

The moment that he gave a sign of advancing against his ravishers, the captive's life would pay the penalty; if he merely remained in arms, without direct attack, she would be made the Marquis's mistress, and abandoned later to the army. The only terms on which he could have her restored were instant submission to the imperial rule, and personal homage of himself and all his Djouad to the Marquis as the representative of France—homage in which they should confess themselves dogs and the sons of dogs.

So ran the message of peace.

The Chasseur read on to the end calmly. Then he lifted his gaze, and looked at the Emir;—he expected fifty swords to be buried in his heart.

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As he gazed, he thought no more of his own doom; he thought only of the revelation before him, of what passion and what agony could be—things unknown in the world where the chief portion of his life had passed. He was a war-hardened campaigner, trained in the ruthless school of African hostilities, who had seen every shape of mental and physical suffering, when men were left to perish of gun-wounds, as the rush of the charge swept on; when writhing horses died by the score of famine and of thirst; when the firebrand was hurled among sleeping encampments, and defenceless women were torn from their rest by the unsparing hands of pitiless soldiers. But the torture which shook for a second the steel-knit frame of this Arab passed all that he had dreamed as possible; it was mute, and held in bonds of iron, for the sake of the desert pride of a great ruler's majesty; but it spoke more than any eloquence ever spoke yet on earth.

With a wild, shrill yell, the Bedouins whirled their naked sabres above their heads, and rushed down on the bearer of this shame to their chief and their tribe. The Chasseur did not seek to defend himself. He sat motionless. He thought the vengeance just.

The Sheik raised his sword, and signed them back, as he pointed to the white folds of the flag. Then his voice rolled out like thunder over the stillness of the plains:—

"But that you trust yourself to my honor, I would rend you limb from limb. Go back to the tiger who rules you, and tell him that—as Allah liveth—I will fall on him and smite him as he hath never been smitten. Dead or living, I will have back my own. If he take her life, I will have ten thousand lives to answer it; if he deal her dishonor, I will light such a holy war through the length

and breadth of the land that his nation shall be driven backward like choked dogs into the sea, and perish from the face of the earth for evermore. And this I swear by the Law and the Prophet!"

The menace rolled out, imperious as a monarch's, thrilling through the desert hush. The Chasseur bent his head, as the words closed. His own teeth were tightly clinched, and his face was dark.

"Emir, listen to one word," he said briefly. "Shame has been done to me as to you. Had I been told what words I bore, they had never been brought by my hand. You know me. You have had the marks of my steel, as I have had the marks of yours. Trust me in this, Sidi. I pledge you my honor, that, before the sun sets, she shall be given back to you unharmed, or I will return here myself, and your tribe shall slay me in what fashion they will. So alone can she be saved uninjured. Answer, will you have faith in me?"

The desert chief looked at him long; sitting motionless as a statue on his stallion, with the fierce gleam of his eyes fixed on the eyes of the man who so long had been his foe in contests whose chivalry equalled their daring. The Chasseur never wavered once under the set, piercing, ruthless gaze.

Then the Emir pointed to the sun, that was now at its zenith:

"You are a great warrior: such men do not lie. Go, and if she be borne to me before the sun is half-way sunk toward the west, all the branches of the tribes of Ilderim shall be as your brethren, and bend as steel to your bidding. If not—as God is mighty—not one man in all your host shall live to tell the tale!"

The Chasseur bowed his head to his horse's mane;

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then, without a word, wheeled round, and sped back across the plain.

When he reached his own cavalry camp, he went straightway to his chief. What passed between them none ever knew. The interview was brief; it was possibly as stormy. Pregnant and decisive it assuredly was; and the squadrons of Africa marvelled that the man who dared beard Raoul de Châteauroy in his lair came forth with his life. Whatever the spell he used, the result was a marvel.

At the very moment that the sun touched the lower half of the western heavens, the Sheik Ilderim, where he sat in his saddle, with all his tribe stretching behind him, full armed, to sweep down like falcons on the spoilers, if the hour passed with the pledge unredeemed, saw the form of the Chasseur reappear between his sight and the glare of the skies; nor did he ride alone. That night the Pearl of the Desert lay once more in the mighty, sinuous arms of the great Emir.

But, with the dawn, his vengeance fell in terrible fashion on the sleeping camp of the Franks; and from that hour dated the passionate, savage, unconcealed hate of Raoul de Châteauroy to the most daring soldier of all his fiery Horse, known in his troop as "Bel-à-faire-peur."

It was in the tent of Ilderim now that he reclined, looking outward at the night where flames were leaping ruddily under a large caldron, and far beyond was the dark immensity of the star-studded sky; the light of the moon strayed in and fell on the chestnut waves of his beard, out of which the long amber stem of an Arab pipe glittered like a golden line, and on the delicate, feminine cast of his profile, which, with the fairness of the skin—fair despite a warm hue of bronze—and the long slumbrous softness of the hazel eyes, were in so

marked a contrast of race with the eagle outlines of the Bedouins around.

From the hour of the restoration of his treasure the Sheik had been true to his oath; his tribe in all its branches had held the French *lascar* in closest brotherhood; wherever they were he was honored and welcomed; was he in war, their swords were drawn for him; was he in need, their houses of hair were spread for him; had he want of flight, the swiftest and most precious of their horses was at his service; had he thirst, they would have died themselves, wringing out the last drop from the water-skin for him. Through him their alliance, or more justly to speak, their neutrality, was secured to France, and the Bedouin Chief loved him with a great, silent, noble love that was fast rooted in the granite of his nature. Between them there was a brotherhood that beat down the antagonism of race, and was stronger than the instinctive hate of the oppressed for all who came under the abhorred standard of the usurpers. He liked the Arabs, and they liked him; a grave courtesy, a preference for the fewest words and least demonstration possible, a marked opinion that silence was golden, and that speech was at best only silver-washed metal, an instinctive dread of all discovery of emotion, and a limitless power of resisting and suppressing suffering, were qualities the nomads of the desert and the *lion* of the Chasseurs d'Afrique had in common; as they had in unison a wild passion for war, a dauntless zest in danger, and a love for the hottest heat of fiercest battle.

Silence reigned in the tent, beyond whose first division, screened by a heavy curtain of goat's hair, the beautiful young Djelma played with her only son, a child of three or four summers; the Sheik lay mute, the Djouad and Marabouts around never spoke in his presence unless

their lord bade them, and the Chasseur was stretched motionless, his elbow resting on a cushion of Morocco fabric, and his eyes looking outward at the restless, changing movement of the firelit, starlit camp.

After the noise, the mirth, the riotous songs, and the gay, elastic good humor of his French comrades, the silence and the calm of the Emir's "house of hair" were welcome to him. He never spoke much himself; of a truth his gentle, immutable laconism was the only charge that his Chambrée ever brought against him. That a man could be so brief in words, while yet so soft in manner, seemed a thing out of all nature to the vivacious Frenchmen; that unchanging stillness and serenity in one who was such a reckless, resistless *croque-mitaine*, swift as fire in the field, was an enigma that the Cavalerie and the Demi-cavalerie of Algeria never solved. His corps would have gone after him to the devil, as Claude de Chanrellon had averred; but they would sometimes wax a little impatient that he would never grow communicative or thread many phrases together, even over the best wine which ever warmed the hearts of its drinkers or loosened all rein from their lips.

"I wish I had come straight to you, Sidi, when I first set foot in Africa," he said at last, while the fragrant smoke uncurled from under the droop of his long pendant moustaches.

"Truly it had been well," answered the Khalifa, who would have given the best stallions in his stud to have had this Frank with him in warfare, and in peace, "there is no life like our life."

"Faith! I think not," murmured the Chasseur, rather to himself than the Bedouin. "The desert keeps you and your horse, and you can let all the rest of the world 'slide.'"

"But we are murderers and pillagers, say your nations," resumed the Emir, with the shadow of a sardonic smile flickering an instant over the sternness and composure of his features. "To rifle a caravan is a crime, though to steal a continent is glory."

Bel-à-faire-peur laughed slightly.

"Do not tempt me to rebel against my adopted flag."

The Sheik looked at him in silence; the French soldiers had spent twelve years in the ceaseless exertions of an amused inquisitiveness to discover the antecedents of their volunteer; the Arabs with their loftier instincts of courtesy had never hinted to him a question of whence or why he had come upon African soil.

"I never thought at all in those days, else, had I thought twice, I should not have gone to your enemies," he answered as he lazily watched the Bedouins without squat on their heels round the huge brass bowls of cous-coussou, which they kneaded into round lumps and pitched between their open bearded lips in their customary form of supper. "Not but what our *Roumis* are brave fellows enough; better comrades no man could want."

The Khalifa took the long pipe from his mouth and spoke; his slow sonorous accents falling melodiously on the silence in the *lingua sapir* of the Franco-Arab tongue.

"Your comrades are gallant men; they are *lascars kébirs*,* and fearless foes; against such my voice is never lifted, however my sword may cross with them. But the locust-swarms that devour the land are the money-eaters, the petty despots, the bribe-takers, the men who wring gold out of infamy, who traffic in tyrannies, who plunder under official seals, who curse Algiers with avarice, with fraud, with routine, with the hell-spawn of civilization.

* Great Warriors.

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It is the 'Bureaucratie' as your tongue phrases it, that is the spoiler and the oppressor of the soil. But,—Inshallah! we endure only for awhile. A little, and the shame of the invader's tread will be washed out in blood. Allah is great, we can wait."

And with Moslem patience that the fiery gloom of his burning eyes belied, the Djied stretched himself once more into immovable and silent rest.

The Chasseur answered nothing; his sympathies were heart-felt with the Arabs, his allegiance and his esprit du corps were with the service in which he was enrolled. He could not defend French usurpation; but neither could he condemn the Flag that had now become his Flag, and in which he had grown to feel much of national honor, to take much of national pride.

"They will never really win again, I am afraid," he thought as his eyes followed the wraith-like flash of the white burnous, as the Bedouins glided to and fro in the chiar'oscuro of the encampment, now in the flicker of the flame, now in the silvered lustre of the moon. "It is the conflict of the races, as the cant runs, and their day is done. It is a bolder, freer, simpler type than anything we get in the world yonder. Shall we ever drift back to it in the future, I wonder?"

The speculation did not stay with him long; Semitic, Latin, or Teuton race was very much the same to him, and intellectual subtleties had not much attraction at any time for the most brilliant soldier in the French cavalry; he preferred the ring of the trumpets, the glitter of the sun's play along the line of steel as his regiment formed in line on the eve of a life-and-death struggle, the wild breathless sweep of a midnight gallop over the brown swelling plateau under the light of the stars, or,—in some brief interval of indolence, and razzia-won wealth,—the

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gleam of fair eyes and the flush of sparkling sherbet when some passionate darkling glance beamed on him from some Arab mistress whose scarlet lips murmured to him through the drowsy hush of an Algerine night the sense if not the song of Pelagia,

> Life is so short at best!
> Take while thou canst thy rest,
> Sleeping by me!

His thoughts drifted back over many varied scenes and changing memories of his service in Algiers, as he lay there at the entrance of the Sheik's tent, with the night of looming shadow, and reddened firelight, and picturesque movement before him. Hours of reckless headlong delight, when men grew drunk with bloodshed as with wine; hours of horrible, unsuccored suffering, when the desert thirst had burned in his throat, and the jagged lances been broken off at the hilt in his flesh, while above head the carrion birds wheeled, waiting their meal; hours of unceasing, unsparing slaughter, when the word was given to slay and yield no mercy, where in the great, vaulted, cavernous gloom of rent rocks, the doomed were hemmed as close as sheep in shambles. Hours, in the warm flush of an African dawn, when the arbiter of the duel was the sole judge allowed or comprehended by the tigers of the tricolor, and to aim a dead shot or to receive one was the only alternative left, as the challenging eyes of "Zéphir" or "Chasse-Marais" flashed death across the *barrière*, in a combat where only one might live, though the root of the quarrel had been nothing more than a toss too much of brandy, a puff of tobacco-smoke construed into insult, or a fille de joie's maliciously cast firebrand of taunt or laugh. Hours of severe discipline, of relentless routine, of bitter deprivation, of campaigns hard as steel in the endurance they needed,

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in the miseries they entailed; of military subjection, stern and unbending, a yoke of iron that a personal and pitiless tyranny weighted with persecution that was scarce less than hatred; of an implicit obedience that required every instinct of liberty, every habit of early life, every impulse of pride, and manhood, and freedom, to be choked down like crimes, and buried as though they had never been. Hours again, that repaid these in full, when the long line of Horse swept out to the attack, with the sun on the points of their weapons; when the wheeling clouds of Arab riders poured like the clouds of the simoom on a thinned, devoted troop that rallied and fought as hawks fight herons, and saved the day as the sky was flushed with that day's decline; when some soft-eyed captive, with limbs of free mountain grace, and the warm veins flushing under the clear olive of her cheeks, was first wild as a young fettered falcon, and then, like the falcon, quickly learned to tremble at a touch, and grow tame under a caress, and love nothing so well as the hand that had captured her. Hours of all the chanceful fortunes of a soldier's life, in hill-wars and desert raids, passed in memory through his thoughts now where he was stretched, looking dreamily through the film of his chibouque-smoke at the city of tents, and the couchant forms of camels, and the tall, white, slowly-moving shapes of the lawless marauders of the sand plains.

"Is my life worth much more under the French Flag than it was under the English?" thought the Chasseur, with a certain careless, indifferent irony on himself, natural to him. "There I killed time—here I kill men. Which is the better pursuit, I wonder? The world would rather economize the first commodity than the last, I believe. Perhaps, it don't make an overgood use of either."

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His thoughts did not stay long with that theme. He was no moralist and no philosopher, though he practised, without ever knowing it, a philosophy of the highest and simplest kind with every day that found him in the ranks of the Algerian army, and had found thought grow on him, in a grave if a desultory fashion, many a time when he had ridden alone through defiles that, for aught he knew, might harbor death with every step, or sat the only wakeful watcher beside a bivouac fire, while his comrades slept around him, and the roar of angry beasts rolled upward from the ravines, or paced to and fro in solitude on patrol duty, with a yawning mountain pass, or a limitless night-veiled plain before him in the light of the moon. He was more silent and more meditative than seemed in keeping with a wild *lion* of the Chasseurs, whose daring out-dared all the fire-eaters, and whose negligent devilry had become a password all over Africa, till "quel p'tit verre a bu Bel-à-faire-peur?" (alias, "what special exploit has he done to-day?") became the question put after every skirmish or expedition. But he was much more of a soldier than a thinker at any time, and, instead of following out the problem of the world's uses of its two raw materials, time and men, he found a subject more congenial in the discussion of stable science with the Emir.

To him the austere chief would unbend; with him the thin, compressed lips of the Arab would grow eloquent with an impressive oratory; for him all the bonds of hospitality would grow closer and warmer. Ilderim might be a pillager, with a sure swoop and a merciless steel, as the officials of imperial government wrote him out; of a truth, caravanserais had felt the tear of his talons, and battalions staggered under the blows of his beak; but he had two desert virtues that are obsolete in the civilized

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world; he had gratitude and he had sincerity. Of course he was but a nomad, a barbarian, a robber, and a ruler of robbers; of course he was but a half-savage Ishmaelite, or he would long have abandoned them.

The night was someway spent when the talk of wild-pigeon-blue mares and sorrel stallions closed between the Djied and his guest; and the French soldier, who had been sent hither from the Bureau Arabe with another of his comrades, took his way through the now still camp where the cattle were sleeping, and the fires were burning out, and the banner-folds hung motionless in the lustre of the stars, to the black and white tent prepared for him. A spacious one, close to the chief's, and given such luxury in the shape of ornamented weapons, thick carpets, and soft cushions, as the tribe's resources, drawn from many a raid on travellers far south, could bring together to testify their hospitality.

As he opened the folds and entered, his fellow-soldier, who was lying on his back, with his heels much higher than his head, and a short pipe in his teeth, tumbled himself up with a rapid summersault, and stood bolt upright, giving the salute; a short, sturdy little man, with a skin burnt like a coffee-berry, that was in odd contrast with his light dancing blue eyes, and his close matted curls of yellow hair.

"Beg pardon, sir! I was half asleep!"

The Chasseur laughed a little.

"*Don't* talk English; somebody will hear you one day."

"What's the odds if they do, sir?" responded the other. "It relieves one's feelins a little. All of 'em know I'm English, but never a one of 'em know what you are. The name you was enrolled by won't really

tell 'em nothing. They guess it ain't yours. That cute little chap, Tata, he says to me yesterday, 'You're always a treatin' of your *galonné* like as if he was a prince.' 'Dammee!' says I, 'I'd like to see the prince as would hold a candle to him.' 'You're right there,' says the little 'un. 'There ain't his equal for takin' off a beggar's head with a back sweep.'"

The Corporal laughed a little again, as he tossed himself down on the carpet.

"Well, it's something to have one virtue! But have a care what those chatterboxes get out of you."

"Lord sir! Ain't I been a takin' care these ten years? It comes quite natural now. I couldn't keep my tongue still; that wouldn't be in anyways possible. So I've let it run on oiled wheels on a thousand rum tracks and doublings. I've told 'em such a lot of amazin' stories about where we kem from, that they've got half a million different styles to choose out of. Some thinks as how you're a Polish nob, what got into hot water with the Russians; some as how you're a Italian prince what was cleaned out like Parma and them was; some as how you're a Austrian Archduke, that have cut your country because you was in love with the Empress, and had a duel about her that scandalized the whole empire; some as how you're a exiled Spanish grandee a' come to learn tactics and that like, that you may go back, and pitch O'Donnell into the middle of next week, whenever you see a chance to cut in and try conclusions with him. Bless you, sir! you may let *me* alone for bamboozlin' of anybody!"

The Corporal laughed again, as he began to unharness himself. There was in him a certain mingling of insouciance and melancholy, each of which alternately

predominated; the former his by nature, the latter born of circumstance.

"If you can outwit our friends the Zephyrs, and the Loustics, and the Indigènes, you have reached a height of diplomacy indeed! I would not engage to do it myself. Take my word for it, ingenuity is always dangerous —silence is always safe."

"That may be, sir," responded the Chasseur, in the sturdy English with which his bright blue eyes danced a fitting nationality. "No doubt it's uncommon good for them as can bring their minds to it—just like water instead o' wine—but it's very tryin' like the teetotalism. You might as well tell a Newfoundland not to love a splash as me not to love a chatter. I'd cut my tongue out sooner than say never a word that you don't wish—but say *somethin'* I must, or die for it."

With which the speaker, known to Algerian fame by the sobriquet of *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort*, from the hair-breadth escapes and reckless razzias from which he had come out without a scratch, dropped on his knees, and began to take off the trappings of his fellow-soldier, with as reverential a service as though he were a lord of the bedchamber serving a Louis Quatorze. The other motioned him gently away.

"No, no. I have told you a thousand times we are comrades and equals now."

"And I've told you a thousand times, sir, that we *aren't*, and never will be, and don't oughtn't to be," replied the soldier, doggedly, drawing off the spurred and dust-covered boots. "A gentleman's a gentleman, let alone what straits he fall into."

"But ceases to be one as soon as he takes a service he cannot requite, or claims a superiority he does

not possess. We have been fellow-soldiers for twelve years——"

"So we have, sir; but we are what we always was, and always will be—one a gentleman, t'other a scamp. If you think so be as I've done a good thing side by side with you now and then in the fightin', give me my own way and let me wait on you when I can. I can't do much on it when those other fellows' eyes is on us; but here I can and I will—beggin' your pardon—so there's an end of it. One may speak plain in this place with nothing but them Arabs about; and all the army know well enough, sir, that if it weren't for that black devil, Châteauroy, you'd have had your officer's commission and your troop too long before now——"

"Oh no. There are scores of men in the ranks merit promotion better far than I do. And,—leave the Colonel's name alone. He is our chief, whatever else he be."

The words were calm and careless, but they carried a weight with them that was not to be disputed; "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort" hung his head a little and went on unharnessing his Corporal in silence, contenting himself with muttering in his throat that it was true for all that, and the whole regiment knew it.

"*You* are happy enough in Algeria—eh?" asked the one he served, as he stretched himself on the skins and carpets, and drank down a sherbet that his self-attached attendant had made with a skill learned from a pretty cantinière, who had given him the lesson in return for a slashing blow with which he had struck down two "Riz-pain-sels," who as the best paid men in the army had tried to cheat her in the price of her Cognac.

"I, sir? Never was so happy in my life, sir. I'd be discontented indeed if I wasn't. Always some spicy bit

of fighting. If there aren't a fantasia, as they call it, in the field, there's always somebody to pot in a small way; and if you're lying by in barracks there's always a scrimmage hot as pepper to be got up with fellows that love the row just as well as you do. It's life, that's where it is; it ain't rustin'."

"Then you prefer the French service?"

"Right and away, sir. You see this is how it is," and the redoubtable yellow-haired "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort" paused in the vigorous cleansing and brushing he was bestowing on his Corporal's uniform and stood at ease in his shirt and trowsers, with his eloquence no way impeded by the *brûle-gueule* that was always between his teeth. "Over there in England, you know, sir, pipe-clay is the deuce-and-all; you've always got to have the stock on, and look as stiff as a stake, or it's all up with you; you're that tormented about little things that you get riled and kick the traces before the great 'uns come to try you. There's a lot of lads would be game as game could be in battle, ay, and good lads to boot, doing their duty right as a trivet when it came to anything like war, that are clean druv' out of the service in time o' peace, along with all them petty persecutions that worry a man's skin like mosquito-bites. Now here they know that, and Lord! what soldiers they do make through knowing of it! It's tight enough and stern enough in big things; martial law sharp enough, and obedience to the letter all through the campaigning; but that don't grate on a fellow; if he's worth his salt he's sure to understand that he must move like clockwork in a fight, and that he's to go to hell at double-quick-march, and mute as a mouse, if his officers see fit to send him. *That's* all right, but they don't fidget you here about the little fal-lals; you may stick your pipe

in your mouth, you may have your lark, you may do as you like, you may spend your *décompte* how you choose, you may settle your little duel as you will, you may shout and sing and jump and riot on the march, so long as you *march on;* you may lounge about half dressed in any style as suits you best, so long as you're up to time when the trumpets sound for you; and that's what a man likes. He's ready to be a machine when the machine's wanted in working trim, but when it's run off the line and the steam all let off, he do like to oil his own wheels, and lie a bit in the sun at his fancy. There aren't better stuff to make soldiers out of nowhere than Englishmen, God bless 'em, but they're badgered, they're horribly badgered, and that's why the service don't take over there, let alone the way the country grudge 'em every bit of pay. In England you go in the ranks—well, they all just tell you you're a blackguard, and there's the lash, and you'd better behave yourself or you'll get it hot and hot; they take for granted you're a bad lot or you wouldn't be there, and in course you're riled and go to the bad according, seeing that it's what's expected of you. Here, contrariwise, you come in the ranks and get a welcome, and feel that it just rests with yourself whether you won't be a fine fellow or not; and just along of feelin' that you're pricked to show the best metal you're made on, and not to let nobody else beat you out of the race like. Ah! it makes a wonderful difference to a fellow—a wonderful difference—whether the service he's come into look at him as a scamp that never will be nothin' *but* a scamp, or as a rascal that's maybe got in him, all rascal though he is, the pluck to turn into a hero. It makes a wonderful difference, this 'ere, whether you're looked at as stuff that's only fit to be shovelled into the sand after a battle; or as stuff that'll belike churn into a great man. And

it's just that difference, sir, that France has found out, and England hasn't—God bless her all the same."

With which the soldier whom England had turned adrift, and France had won in her stead, concluded his long oration by dropping on his knees to refill his Corporal's chibouque.

"A army's just a machine, sir, in course," he concluded, as he rammed in the Turkish tobacco. "But then it's a live machine for all that; and each little bit of it feels for itself like the joints in an eel's body. Now, if only one of them little bits smarts, the whole crittur goes wrong—there's the mischief."

Bel-à-faire-peur listened thoughtfully to his comrade where he lay flung full length on the skins.

"I dare say you are right enough. I knew nothing of my men when—when I was in England; we none of us did; but I can very well believe what you say. Yet—fine fellows though they are here, they are terrible blackguards!"

"In course they are, sir; they wouldn't be such larky company unless they was. But what I say is that they're scamps who're told they may be great men if they like; not scamps who're told that because they're once gone to the devil they must always keep there. It makes all the difference in life."

"Yes—it makes all the difference in life, whether hope is left, or—left out!"

The words were murmured with a half smile that had a dash of infinite sadness in it; the other looked at him quickly with a shadow of keen pain passing over the bright, frank, laughing features of his sunburnt face; he knew that the brief words held the whole history of a life.

"Won't there *never* be no hope, sir?" he whispered, while his voice trembled a little under the long fierce "Zephyr" sweep of his yellow moustaches.

The Chasseur rallied himself with a slight, careless laugh, the laugh with which he had met before now the onslaught of charges ferocious as those of the magnificent day of Mazagran.

"Whom for? Both of us? Oh yes, very likely we shall achieve fame, and die sous-officiers or gardes-champêtres! A splendid destiny."

"No, sir," said the other with the hesitation still in the quiver of his voice. "You know I meant, no hope of your ever being again——"

He stopped; he scarcely knew how to phrase the thoughts he was thinking.

The other moved with a certain impatience.

"How often must I tell you to forget that I was ever anything except a soldier of France?—forget as I have forgotten it!"

The audacious, irrepressible "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort," whom nothing could daunt and nothing could awe, looked penitent and ashamed as a chidden spaniel.

"I know, sir. I have tried, many a year, but I thought perhaps as how his lordship's death——"

"No life and no death can make any difference to me, except the death that some day an Arbico's lunge will give me; and that is a long time coming."

"Ah, for God's sake, Mr. Cecil, don't talk like this!"

The Chasseur gave a short, sharp shiver, and started at the name, as if a bullet had struck him.

"Never say that again!"

Rake, Algerian-christened *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort*, stammered a contrite apology.

"I never have done, sir,—not for never a year, but it wrung it out of me like—you talking of wanting death in that way——"

"Oh, I don't want death!" laughed the other, with a low, indifferent laughter, that had in it a singular tone of sadness all the while. "I am of our friends the Spahis' opinion—that life is very pleasant with a handsome well-chosen harem, and a good horse to one's saddle. Unhappily harems are too expensive for Roumis! Yet I am not sure that I am not better amused in the Chasseurs than I was in the Household—specially when we are at war. I suppose we must be wild animals at the core, or we should never find such an infinite zest in the death grapple. Good night!"

He stretched his long, slender, symmetrical limbs out on the skins that made his bed, and closed his eyes, with the chibouque still in his mouth, and its amber bowl resting on the carpet, which the friendship and honor of Sidi-Ilderim had strewn over the bare turf on which the house of hair was raised. He was accustomed to sleep as soldiers sleep, in all the din of a camp, or with the roar of savage brutes echoing from the hills around, with his saddle beneath his head, under a slab of rock, or with the knowledge that at every instant the alarm might be given, the drums roll out over the night, and the enemy be down like lightning on the bivouac. But now a name—long unspoken to him—had recalled years he had buried far and for ever from the first day that he had worn the *képi d'ordonnance* of the Army of Algeria, and been enrolled among its wild and brilliant soldiers.

Now, long after his comrade had slept soundly, and the light in the single bronze Turkish candle-branch had flickered and died away, the Chasseur d'Afrique lay

wakeful, looking outward through the folds of the tent at the dark and silent camp of the Arabs, and letting his memory drift backward to a time that had grown to be to him as a dream—a time when another world than the world of Africa had known him as Bertie Cecil.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Cigarette en Bienfaitrice.

"Oh hé! We are a queer lot; a very queer lot. Sweepings of Europe," said Claude de Chanrellon, dashing some vermout off his golden moustaches, where he lay full length on three chairs outside the Café in the Place du Gouvernement, where the lamps were just alit, and shining through the burnished moonlight of an Algerian evening, and the many-colored, many-raced, picturesque, and polyglot population of the town were all fluttering out with the sunset, like so many gay-colored moths.

"Hein! Diamonds are found in the *chiffonier's** sweepings," growled a General of Division, who was the most terrible martinet in the whole of the French service, but who loved "*mes enfans d'enfer*,"** as he was wont to term his men, with a great love, and who would never hear another disparage them, however he might order them blows of the *matraque*, or exile them to Beylick himself.

"You are poetic, mon Général," said Claude de Chanrellon; "but you are true. We are a furnace in which Blackguardism is burnt into Dare-devilry, and turned out as Heroism. A fine manufacture that, and one at which France has no equal."

* Rag-picker.

** My children of hell.

"But our manufactures keep the original hall mark, and show that the devil made them if the drill have moulded them!" urged a Colonel of Tirailleurs Indigènes.

Chanrellon laughed, knocking the ash off a huge cigar.

"Pardieu! We do our original maker credit then; nothing good in this world without a dash of diablerie. Scruples are the wet blankets, proprieties are the blank walls, principles are the quickset hedges of life, but devilry is its champagne!"

"Ventrebleu!" growled the General. "We have a right to praise the blackguards; without them our conscripts would be very poor trash. The conscript fights because he has to fight, the blackguard fights because he loves to fight. A great difference that."

The Colonel of Tirailleurs lifted his eyes; a slight pale effeminate dark-eyed Parisian, who looked scarcely stronger than a hot-house flower, yet who, as many an African chronicle could tell, was swift as fire, keen as steel, unerring as a leopard's leap, untiring as an Indian on trail, once in the field with his Indigènes.

"In proportion as one loves powder, one has been a scoundrel, mon Général," he murmured, "what the catalogue of your crimes must be!"

The tough old campaigner laughed grimly; he took it as a high compliment.

"Sapristi! The cardinal virtues don't send anybody I guess into African service. And yet, pardieu, I don't know. What fellows I have known! I have had men among my Zephyrs—and they were the wildest *pratiques* too—that would have ruled the world! I have had more wit, more address, more genius, more devotion, in some headlong scamp of a *loustic* than all the courts and cabinets would furnish. Such lives, such lives too, morbleu!"

And he drained his absinthe thoughtfully, musing on the marvellous vicissitudes of war, and on the patrician blood, the wasted wit, the Beaumarchais talent, the Mirabeau power, the adventures like a page of fairy tale, the brains whose strength could have guided a sceptre, which he had found and known, hidden under the rough uniform of a Zephyr, buried beneath the canvas shirts of a Roumi, lost for ever in the wild lawless escapades of rebellious *pratiques*,* who closed their days in the stifling darkness of the dungeons of Beylick, or in some obscure skirmish, some midnight vidette, where an Arab flissa severed the cord of the warped life, and the death was unhonored by even a line in the Gazettes du Jour.

"Faith!" laughed Chanrellon, regardless of the General's observation. "If we all published our memoirs, the world would have a droll book. Dumas and Terrail would be beat out of the field. The real recruiting sergeants that send us to the ranks would be soon found to be——"

"Women!" growled the General.

"Cards," sighed the Colonel.

"Absinthe," muttered another.

"Mussetism in a garret."

"Politics *un peu trop fort*."

"A comedy that was hissed."

"Carbonarist vows when one was a fool."

"The spleen."

"The dice."

"The roulette."

"The natural desire of humanity to kill and to get killed!"

"Morbleu!" cried Chanrellon, as the voices closed,

* Insubordinates

"all those mischiefs beat the drum, and send volunteers to the ranks, sure enough; but the General named the worst. Look at that little Cora; the Minister of War should give her the Cross. She sends us ten times more fire-eaters than the Conscription does. Five fine fellows —of the *vieille roche* too—joined to-day, because she has stripped them of everything, and they have nothing for it but the service. She is invaluable, Cora."

"And there is not much to look at in her either," objected a captain, who commanded Turcos. "I saw her when our detachment went to show in Paris. A baby face, innocent as a cherub—a soft voice—a shape that looks as slight and as breakable as the stem of my glass —there is the end!"

The Colonel of Tirailleurs laughed scornfully but gently; he had been a great *lion* of the fashionable world before he came out to his Indigènes.

"The end of Cora! The end of her is—*'l'Enfer!'* My good Alcide—that 'baby face' has ruined more of us than would make up a battalion. She is so quiet, so tender; smiles like an angel, glides like a fawn; is a little sad too, the innocent dove; looks at you with eyes as clear as water, and paf! before you know where you are, she has pillaged with both hands, and you wake one fine morning bankrupt!"

"Why do you let her do it?" growled the *vieille moustache*, who had served under Junot, when a little lad, and had scant knowledge of the ways and wiles of the syrens of the Rue Bréda.

"Ah-bah!" said the Colonel, with a shrug of his shoulders; "it is the thing to be ruined by Cora. There is Bébée-je-m'enfous; there is Blonde-Miou-Miou; there is the Cerisette; there is Neroli; there is Loto—any one of

them is equally good style with Cora; but to be at all in the fashion, one must have been talked of with one of the six."

"Diantre!" sighed Claude de Chanrellon, stretching his handsome limbs, with a sigh of recollection; for Paris had been a Paradise Lost to him for many seasons, and he had had of late years but one solitary glimpse of it. "It was Cœur d'Acier who was the rage in my time. She ate me up—that woman—in three months. I had not a hundred francs left: she stripped me as bare as a pigeon. Her passion was emeralds *en cabochon** just then. Well, emeralds *en cabochon* made an end of me, and sent me out here. Cœur d'Acier was a wonderful woman!—and the chief wonder of her was, that she was as ugly as sin."

"Ugly?"

"Ugly as sin! But she had the knack of making herself more charming than Venus. How she did it nobody knew; but men left the prettiest creatures for her: and she ruined us, I think, at the rate of a score a month."

"Like Loto," chimed in the Tirailleur. "Loto has not a shred of beauty. She is a big, angular, raw-boned Normande, with a rough voice, and a villanous patois; but to be well with Loto is to have achieved distinction at once. She will have nothing under the third order of nobility; and Prince Paul shot the Duc de Var about her the other day. She is a great creature, Loto: nobody knows her secret."

"*L'audace, mon ami; toujours de l'audace!*"** said Chanrellon, with a twist of his superb moustaches. "It is the finest quality out; nothing so sure to win. Hallo!

* Emeralds uncut.

** Audacity, my friend! Always that!

there is *le beau caporal* listening. Ah! Bel-à-faire-peur, you fell, too, among the Lotos and the Cœurs d'Acier once, I will warrant."

The Chasseur, who was passing, paused and smiled a little, as he saluted.

"Cœurs d'Acier are to be found in all ranks of the sex, monsieur, I fancy?"

"Bah! you beg the question. Did not a woman send you out here—eh?"

"No, monsieur—only chance."

"A fig for your chance! Women are the mischief that casts us adrift to chance."

"Monsieur, we cast ourselves sometimes."

"Dieu de Dieu! I doubt that. We should go straight enough if it were not for them."

The Chasseur smiled again.

"M. le Vicomte thinks we are sure to be right, then, if, for the key to every black story, we ask, 'Who was she?'"

"Of course I do. Well! who was she? We are all quoting our tempters to-night. Give us your story, *mon brave!*"

"Monsieur, you have it in the *folios matricules*, as well as my sword could write it."

"Good, good!" muttered the listening General. The soldier-like answer pleased him, and he looked attentively at the giver of it.

Chanrellon's brown eyes flashed a bright response.

"And your sword writes in a brave man's fashion—writes what France loves to read. But before you wore your sword here? Tell us of that. It was a romance—wasn't it?"

"If it were, I have folded down the page, monsieur."

"Open it then! Come—what brought you out among us? You had gamed *au roi dépouillé*—that was it. Out with it!"

"Monsieur, direct obedience is a soldier's duty; but I never heard that inquisitive annoyance was an officer's privilege?"

The words were calm, cold, a little languid, and a little haughty. The manner of old habit, the instinct of buried pride spoke in them, and disregarded the barrier between a private of Chasseurs who was but a sous-officier, and a Colonel Commandant who was also a noble of France.

Involuntarily, all the men sitting round the little tables, outside the café, turned and looked at him. The boldness of speech and the quietude of tone drew all their eyes in curiosity upon him.

Chanrellon flushed scarlet over his frank brow, and an instant's passion gleamed out of his eyes: the next he threw his three chairs down with a crash, as he shook his mighty frame like an Alpine dog, and bowed with a French grace, with a campaigner's frankness.

"A right rebuke!—fairly given, and well deserved. I thank you for the lesson."

The Chasseur looked surprised and moved; in truth, he was more touched than he showed. Under the rule of Châteauroy, consideration or courtesy had been things long unshown to him. Involuntarily, forgetful of rank, he stretched his hand out, on the impulse of soldier to soldier, of gentleman to gentleman. Then, as the bitter remembrance of the difference of rank and station between them flashed on his memory, he was raising it proudly but deferentially, in the salute of a subordinate to his

superior, when Chanrellon's grasp closed on it readily. The victim of Cœur d'Acier was of as gallant a temper as ever blent the reckless *condottière* with the thoroughbred noble.

The Chasseur colored slightly, as he remembered that he had forgotten alike his own position, and their relative stations.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Vicomte," he said simply, as he gave the salute with ceremonious grace, and passed onward rapidly, as though he wished to forget and to have forgotten the momentary self-oblivion of which he had been guilty.

"Dieu!" muttered Chanrellon, as he looked after him, and struck his hand on the marble-topped table till the glasses shook. "I would give a year's pay to know that fine fellow's history. He is a gentleman—every inch of him."

"And a good soldier, which is better," growled the General of Brigade, who had begun life in his time driving an ox-plough over the heavy tillage of Alsace.

"A private of Châteauroy—eh?" asked the Tirailleur, lifting his eye-glass to watch the Chasseur as he went.

"Pardieu,—yes,—more's the pity," said Chanrellon, who spoke his thoughts as hastily as a hand-grenade scatters its powder. "The Black Hawk hates him—God knows why—and he is kept down in consequence, as if he were the idlest lout or the most incorrigible rebel in the service. Look at what he has done. All the Bureaux will tell you there is not a finer Roumi in Africa—not even among our Schaouacks! Since he joined, there has not been a hot and heavy thing with the Arabs that he has not had his share in. There has not been a campaign in Oran or Kabaila that he has not gone out with. His limbs are

slashed all over with Bedouin steel. He rode once twenty leagues to deliver dispatches with a spear-head in his side, and fell, in a dead faint, out of his saddle just as he gave them up to the commandant's own hands. He saved the day, two years ago, at Granaila. We should have been cut to pieces, as sure as destiny, if he had not collected a handful of broken Chasseurs together, and rallied them, and rated them, and lashed them with their shame, till they dashed with him to a man into the the thickest of the fight, and pierced the Arab's centre, and gave us breathing room, till we all charged together, and beat the *Arbicos* back like a herd of jackals. There are a hundred more like stories of him—every one of them true as my sabre;—and, in reward, he has just been made a *galonné!*"

"Superb!" said the General, with grim significance. "*Ce n'est pas à la France—ça!* Twelve years! In five under Napoleon, he would have been at the head of a brigade; but then——" and the veteran drank his absinthe with a regretful melancholy; "but then, Napoleon read his men himself and never read them wrong. It is a divine gift that for commanders."

"The Black Hawk can read, too," said Chanrellon, meditatively; it was the "petit nom," that Châteauroy had gained long before, and by which he was best known through the army. "No eyes are keener than his, to trace a *lascar kébir*. But, where he hates, he strikes beak and talons—pong!—till the thing drops dead—even where he strikes a bird of his own brood."

"That is bad," said the old General, sententiously. "There are four people who should have no personal likes or dislikes: they are an innkeeper, a schoolmaster, a ship's skipper, and a military chief."

With which axiom he called for some more *vert-vert*.

Meanwhile, the Chasseur went his way through the cosmopolitan groups of the great square. A little farther onward, laughing, smoking, chatting, eating ices outside a Café Chantant, were a group of Englishmen—a yachting party, whose schooner lay in the harbor. He lingered a moment, and lighted a fusee, just for the sake of hearing the old familiar words. As he bent his head above the vesuvian, no one saw the shadow of pain that passed over his face.

But one of them looked at him curiously and earnestly: "The deuce," he murmured to the man nearest him, "who the dickens is it that French soldier's like?"

The French soldier heard, and, with the cigar in his teeth, moved away quickly. He was uneasy in the city—uneasy lest he should be recognized by any passer-by or tourist.

"I need not fear that, though," he thought with a smile. "Ten years!—why, in *that* world, we used to forget the blackest ruin in ten days, and the best life among us ten hours after its grave was closed. Besides, I am safe enough. I am dead!"

And he pursued his onward way, with the red glow of the cigar under the chestnut splendor of his beard, and the black eyes of veiled Moresco women flashed lovingly on his tall lithe form, with the scarlet *ceinturon* swathed round his loins, and the scarlet undress fez set on his forehead, fair as a woman's still, despite of the tawny glow of the Afric sun, that had been on it for so long.

He was "dead;" therein had lain all his security; thereby had "Beauty of the Brigades" been buried beyond all discovery in "Bel-à-faire-peur" of the 2nd Chasseurs d'Afrique. When, on the Marseilles rails, the macera-

tion and slaughter of as terrible an accident as ever befell a train rushing through midnight darkness, at headlong speed, had left himself and the one man faithful to his fortunes unharmed by little less than a miracle; he had seen in the calamity the surest screen from discovery or pursuit.

Leaving the baggage where it was jammed among the débris, he had struck across the country with Rake for the few leagues that still lay between them and the city, and had entered Marseilles as weary foot travellers, before half the ruin on the rails had been seen by the full noon sun.

As it chanced, a trading yawl was loading in the port, to run across to Algiers that very day. The skipper was short of men, and afraid of the Lascars, who were the only sailors that he seemed likely to find, to fill up the vacant places in his small crew.

Cecil offered himself and his comrade for the passage. He had only a very few gold pieces on his person, and he was willing to work his way across, if he could.

"But you're a gentleman," said the skipper, doubtfully eyeing him, and his velvet dress, and his black *sombrero* with its eagle's plume. "I want a rare, rough, able seaman, for there'll be like to be foul weather. She looks too fair to last," he concluded, with a glance upward at the sky.

He was a Liverpool man, master and owner of his own rakish-looking little black-hulled craft, that, rumor was wont to say, was not averse to a bit of slaving, if she found herself in far seas, with a likely run before her.

"You're a swell, that's what you are," emphasized the skipper. "You bean't no sort of use to me."

"Wait a second," answered Cecil. "Did you ever chance to hear of a schooner called *Regina*?"

The skipper's face lighted in a moment.

"Her as was in the Biscay, July come two years? her as druv' through the storm like a mad thing, and flew like a swallow, when everything was splittin' and founderin', and shipping seas around her? her as was the first to bear down to the great *Wrestler*, a-lyin' there hull over in water, and took aboard all as ever she could hold o' the passengers, a-pitchin' out her own beautiful cabin fittins to have as much room for the poor wretches as ever she could? Be you a-meanin' her?"

Cecil nodded assent.

"She was my yacht, that's all; and I was without a captain through that storm. Will you think me a good enough sailor now?"

The skipper wrung his hand, till he nearly wrung it off.

"Good enough! Blast my timbers! there aren't one will beat you in any waters. Come on, sir, if so be as you wishes it; but never a stroke of work shall you do atween *my* decks. I never did think as how one of your yachting nobs could ever be fit to lay hold of a tiller; but, hang me, if the Club make such sailors as you it's a rare 'un! Lord a mercy! why, my wife was in the *Wrestler*. I've heard her tell scores of times as how she was a'most dead when that little yacht came through a swaling sea, that was all heavin' and roarin' round the wreck, and as how the swell what owned it gev' his cabin up to the womenkind, and had his swivel guns and his handsome furniture pitched over-board, that he might be able to carry more passengers, and fed 'em, and gev' 'em champagne all around, and treated 'em

like a prince, till he ran 'em straight into Brest Harbor. But, damn me! that ever a swell like you should——"

"Let's weigh anchor," said Bertie, quietly.

And so he crossed unnoticed to Algeria, while through Europe the tidings went, that the mutilated form, crushed between iron and wood, on the Marseilles line, was his, and that he had perished in that awful, ink-black, sultry southern night, when the rushing trains had met, as meet the thunderclouds. The world thought him dead; as such the journals recorded him, with the shameful outlines of imputed crime, to make the death the darker; as such his name was forbidden to be uttered at Royallieu; as such the Seraph mourned him with passionate loving force, refusing to the last to accredit his guilt:—and he, leaving them in their error, was drafted into the French army under two of his Christian names, which happily had a foreign sound—Louis Victor—and laid aside for ever his identity as Bertie Cecil.

He went at once on service in the interior, and had scarcely come in any of the larger towns since he had joined. His only danger of recognition had once been when a Marshal of France, whom he had used to know well in Paris and at the Court of St. James, held an inspection of the African troops.

Filing past the brilliant staff, he had ridden at only a few yards' distance from his old acquaintance, and, as he saluted, had glanced involuntarily at the face that he had seen oftentimes in the Salles des Maréchaux, and even under the roof of Royallieu. The great chief's keen blue eyes were scrutinizing the regiment, ready to note a chain loose, a belt awry, a sword specked with rust, if such a sin there were against "*les ordonnances*" in all the glittering squadrons; and swept over him, seeing

in him but one among thousands—a unit in the mighty aggregate of the "raw material" of war.

The Marshal only muttered to a General beside him, "Why don't they all ride like that man? He has the seat of the English Guards." But that it was in truth an officer of the English Guards, and a friend of his own, who paced past him as a private of Algerian Horse, the French leader never dreamed.

From the extremes of luxury, indolence, indulgence, pleasure, and extravagance, Cecil came to the extremes of hardship, poverty, discipline, suffering, and toil. From a life where every sense was gratified, he came to a life where every privation was endured. He had led the fashion;—he came where he had to bear without a word the curses, oaths, and insults of a corporal or a sous-lieutenant. He had been used to every delicacy and delight;—he came where he had to take the coarse black bread of the army as a rich repast. He had thought it too much trouble to murmur flatteries in great ladies' ears;—he came where morning, noon, and night the inexorable demands of rigid rules compelled his incessant obedience, vigilance, activity, and self-denial. He had known nothing from his childhood up except an atmosphere of amusement, refinery, brilliancy, and idleness;—he came where gnawing hunger, brutalized jest, ceaseless toil, coarse obscenity, agonized pain, and pandemoniac mirth alternately filled the measure of the days.

A sharper contrast, a darker ordeal, rarely tried the steel of any man's endurance; yet, under it, he verified the truth, "*Bon sang ne peut mentir.*" No Spartan could have borne the change more mutely, more staunchly, than did the "dandy of the Household."

The first years were, it is true, years of intense misery to him. Misery, when all the blood glowed in him under some petty tyrant's jibe, and he had to stand immovable, holding his peace. Misery, when the hunger and thirst of long marches tortured him, and his soul sickened at the half-raw offal, and the water thick with dust, and stained with blood, which the men round him seized so ravenously. Misery, when the dreary dawn broke, only to usher in a day of mechanical manœuvres, of petty tyrannies, of barren burdensome hours in the exercise-ground, of convoy duty in the burning sun-glare, and under the heat of harness; and the weary night fell with the din and uproar, and the villanous blasphemy, and befouled merriment of the riotous Chambrée, that denied even the peace and oblivion of sleep. They were years of infinite wretchedness oftentimes, only relieved by the loyalty and devotion of the man who had followed him into his exile. But, however wretched, they never wrung a single regret or lament from Cecil. He had come out to this life; he took it as it was. As, having lost the title to command, the high breeding in him made him render implicitly the mute obedience which was the first duty of his present position, so it made him accept, from first to last, without a sign of complaint or of impatience, the altered fortunes of his career. The hardest-trained, lowest-born, longest-inured soldier in the Zephyr ranks did not bear himself with more apparent content and more absolute fortitude than did the man who had used to think it a cruelty to ride with his troop from Windsor to Wormwood Scrubs, and had never taken the trouble to load his own gun any shooting season, or to draw off his own coat any evening. He suffered acutely many times; suffered till he was heart-sick of his life; but he never sought to escape the slightest penalty

or hardship, and not even Rake ever heard from him a single syllable of irritation or of self-pity.

Moreover, the war-fire woke in him.

In one shape or another, active service was almost always his lot, and hot, severe campaigning was his first introduction to military life in Algeria. The latent instinct in him—the instinct that had flashed out during his lazy, fashionable calm in all moments of danger, in all days of keen sport; the instinct that had made him fling himself into the duello with the French boar, and made him mutter to Forest King, "Kill me if you like, but don't *fail* me!"—was the instinct of the born soldier. In peril, in battle, in reckless bravery, in the rush of the charge and the excitement of the surprise, in the near presence of death, and in the chase of a foe through a hot African night when both were armed to the teeth, and one or both must fall when the grapple came—in all these that old instinct, aroused and unloosed, made him content; made him think that the life which brought them was worth the living.

There had always been in him a reckless dare-devilry, which had slept under the serene effeminate insouciance of his careless temper and his pampered habits. It had full rein now, and made him, as the army affirmed, one of the most intrepid, victorious, and chivalrous *lascars* of its fiery ranks. Fate had flung him off his couch of down into the tempest of war, into the sternness of life spent ever on the border of the grave, ruled ever by an iron code, requiring at every step self negation, fortitude, submission, courage, patience, the self-control which should take the uttermost provocation from those in command without even a look of reprisal, and the courageous recklessness which should meet death and deal death,

which should be as the eagle to swoop, as the lion to rend. And he was not found wanting in it.

He was too thoroughbred to attempt to claim a superiority that fortune no longer conferred on him, to seek to obtain a deference that he had no longer the position to demand. He obeyed far more implicitly than many a ruffian filibuster, who had been among the dregs of society from his birth. And though his quick-eyed comrades knew, before he had been among them five minutes, that an "aristocrat" had taken refuge under the Flag of Mazagran, they never experienced from him one touch of the insolence that their own sous-officiers beat them with, as with the flat of the sword; and they never found in him one shadow of the arrogance that some fellow-soldier, who had swelled into a sergeant-major, or bristled into an adjutant, would strut with, like any turkey-cock.

He was too quiet, too courteous, too calmly listless; he had too easy a grace, too soft a voice, and too many gentleman habits, for them. But when they found that he could fight like a Zouave, ride like an Arab, and bear shot-wounds or desert-thirst as though he were of bronze, it grew a delight to them to see of what granite and steel this dainty patrician was made; and they loved him with a rough, ardent, dog-like love, when they found that his last crust, in a long march, would always be divided; that the most desperate service of danger was always volunteered for by him; that no severity of personal chastisement ever made him clear himself of a false charge at a comrade's expense; and that all his *décompte* went in giving a veteran a stoup of wine, or a sick conscript a tempting meal, or a prisoner of Beylick some food through the grating, scaled too at risk of life and limb.

Cecil had all a soldier's temper in him; and the shock which had hurled him out of ease, and levity, and ultra-

luxury, to stand alone before as dark and rugged a fortune as ever fronted any man, had awakened the war fire which had only slumbered because lulled by habit and unaroused by circumstance. He had never before been called on to exert either thought or action; the necessity for both called many latent qualities in him into play. The same nature, which made him wish to be killed over the Grand Military course, rather than live to lose the race, made him now bear privation as calmly, and risk death as recklessly, as the hardiest and most fiery *loustic* of the African cantonments.

Bitter as the life often was, severe the suffering, and acute the deprivation, the sternest veteran scarcely took them more patiently, more silently, than the "aristocrat," to whom a corked claret or a dusty race-day had been calamities. Cast among these wild, iron-muscled Bohemians, who fought like tigers, and were as impenetrable as rhinoceri, "race" was too strong in Cecil not to hold its own with them, whether in the quality of endurance, or the quality of daring.

"*Main de femme, mais main de fer*," the Roumis were wont to say of their comrade, with his delicate habits, "*comme une Marquise du Faubourg*," as they would growl impatiently; and his tenacious patience which would never give way either in the toil of the camp or the grip of the struggle.

On the surface it seemed as though never was there a life more utterly thrown away than the life of a Guardsman and a gentleman, a man of good blood, high rank, and talented gifts had he ever chosen to make anything of them, buried in the ranks of the Franco-African army, risking a nameless grave in the sand with almost every hour, associated with the roughest riffraff of Europe, liable any day to be slain by the slash of an Arab *flissa*,

and rewarded for ten years' splendid service by the distinctive badge of a corporal. Any one of the friends of his former years, seeing him thus, would have said, that he might as well be thrown at once into a pit in the sand, where the dead were piled twenty deep after a skirmish, to lie and rot, or be dug up by the talons of famished beasts, whichever might chance, as live thus in the obscurity, poverty, and semi-barbarism of an Algerian private's existence.

Yet it might be doubted if any life would have done for him what this had done: it might be questioned, if, judging a career not by its social position, but by its effect on character, any other would have been so well for him, or would equally have given steel and strength to the indolence and languor of his nature as this did. In his old world he would have lounged listlessly through fashionable seasons, and, in an atmosphere that encouraged his profound negligence of everything and his natural nil admirari listlessness, would have glided from refinement to effeminacy, and from lazy grace to blasé inertia.

The severity and the dangers of the campaigns with the French army had roused the sleeping lion in him, and made him as fine a soldier as ever ranged under any flag. He had suffered, braved, resented, fought, loved, hated, endured, and even enjoyed, here in Africa, with a force and a vividness that he had never dreamed possible in his calm, passionless, insouciant world of other days. He had known what the hunger of famine, what the torment of fever, what the agony of forbidden pride, what the wild delight of combat were. He had known what it was to long madly for a stoup of water; to lie raving, yet conscious, under the throes of gunshot wounds; to be forced to bear impassively words for a tithe of

which he could have struck across the mouth the chief who spoke them; to find in a draught of wretched wine, after days of marching, a relish that he had never found in the champagnes and burgundies of the Guards' mess; to love the dark Arab eyes, that smiled on him in his exile, as he had never loved those of any woman, and to suffer when the death-film gathered over them as he had never thought it in him to suffer for any death or any life; to feel every nerve thrill, and every vein glow with fierce, exultant joy as the musketry pealed above the plains, and his horse pressed down on to the very mouths of the rifles, and the naked sabres flashed like the play of lightnings, and, over the dead body of his charger, he fought ankle deep in blood, with the Arabs circling like hawks, and their great blades whirling round him, catching the spears aimed at him with one hand, while he beat back their swords, blow for blow, with the other;—he had known all these, the desert passions; and while outwardly they left him much the same in character, they changed him vitally. They developed him into a magnificent soldier—too true a soldier not to make thoroughly his the service he had adopted, not to, oftentimes, almost forget that he had ever lived under any other flag than that tricolor which he followed and defended now.

The quaint heroic Norman motto of his ancestors carved over the gates of Royallieu—"*Cœur Vaillant Se Fait Royaume*"—verified itself in his case. Outlawed, beggared, robbed at a stroke of every hope and prospect, he had taken his adversity boldly by the beard, and had made himself at once a country and a kingdom among the brave, fierce, reckless, loyal hearts of the men who came from north, south, east, and west, driven by every accident, and scourged by every fate, to fill up the battalions of North Africa.

As he went now, in the warmth of the after-glow, he turned up into the Rue Babazoum, and paused before the entrance of a narrow, dark, tumble-down, picturesque shop, half like a stall of a Cairo bazaar, half like a Jew's den in a Florentine alley.

A cunning, wizen head peered out at him from the gloom.

"Ah-ha! good even, Corporal Victor!"

Cecil, at the words, crossed the sill and entered.

"Have you sold any?" he asked. There was a slight constraint and hesitation in the words, as of one who can never fairly bend his spirit to the yoke of barter.

The little, hideous, wrinkled, dwarf-like creature, a trader in curiosities, grinned with a certain gratification, in disappointing this lithe-limbed, handsome Chasseur.

"Not one. The toys don't take. Daggers now, or anything made out of spent balls, or flissa one can tell an Arab story about, go off like wild-fire; but your ivory bagatelles are no sort of use, M. le Caporal."

"Very well—no matter," said Cecil simply, as he paused a moment before some delicate little statuettes and carvings—miniature things, carved out of a piece of ivory, or a block of marble the size of a horse's hoof, such as could be picked up in dry river channels, or broken off stray boulders; slender crucifixes, wreaths of foliage, branches of wild fig, figures of Arabs and Moors, dainty heads of dancing-girls, and tiny chargers fretting like Bucephalus. They were perfectly conceived and executed. He had always had a D'Orsay-like gift that way, though, in common with all his gifts, he had utterly neglected all culture of it, until, cast adrift on the world, and forced to do something to maintain himself, he had watched the skill of the French soldiers at all such ex-

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pedients to gain a few coins, and had solaced many a dreary hour in barracks and under canvas with the toy-sculpture, till he had attained a singular art at it. He had commonly given Rake the office of selling them, and as commonly spent all the proceeds on all other needs save his own.

He lingered a moment, with regret in his eyes; he had scarcely a sou in his pocket, and he had wanted some money sorely that night for a comrade dying of a lung-wound—a noble fellow, a French artist, who, in an evil hour of desperation, had joined the army, with a poet's temper that made its hard, colorless routine unendurable, and had been shot in the chest in a night skirmish.

"You will not buy them yourself?" he asked at length, the color flushing in his face; he would not have pressed the question to save his own life from starving, but Léon Ramon would have no chance of a fruit or a lump of ice to cool his parched lips and still his agonized retching, unless he himself could get money to buy those luxuries that are too splendid and too merciful to be provided for a dying soldier, who knows so little of his duty to his country as to venture to die in his bed.

"Myself!" screeched the dealer, with a derisive laugh. "Ask me to give you my whole stock next, *M. le Galonné!* These trumperies will lie on hand for a year."

Cecil went out of the place without a word; his thoughts were with Léon Ramon, and the insolence scarce touched him. "How shall I get him the ice?" he wondered. "God! if I had only one of the lumps that used to float in our claret cup!"

As he left the den, a military fairy, all gay with blue and crimson, like the fuschia bell she most resembled,

with a meerschaum in her scarlet lips and a world of wrath in her bright black eyes, dashed past him into the darkness within, and before the dealer knew or dreamt of her, tossed up the old man's little shrivelled frame like a shuttlecock, shook him till he shook like custards, flung him upward and caught him as if he were the hoop in a game of La Grace, and set him down bruised, breathless, and terrified out of his wits.

"Ah, *chenapan!*" cried Cigarette, with a volley of slang utterly untranslatable, "that is how you treat your betters, is it? Miser, monster, crocodile, serpent! Harpagon was an angel to you." (She knew Harpagon because some of her Roumis chattered bits of Molière.) "He wanted the money and you refused it? Ah—h—h! son of Satan! you live on other men's miseries! Run after him—quick, and give him this, and this, and this, and this; and say you were only in jest, and that the things were worth a Sheik's ransom. Stay! you must not give him too much, or he will know it is not *you*—viper! Run quick, and breathe a word about me if you dare; one whisper only, and my Spahis shall cut your throat from ear to ear. Off! or you shall have a bullet to quicken your steps; misers dance well when pistols play the minuet!"

With which exordium the little Amie du Drapeau shook her culprit at every epithet, emptied out a shower of gold and silver, just won at play, from the bosom of her uniform, forced it into the dealer's hands, hurled him out of his own door, and drew her pretty weapon with a clash from her sash.

"Run for your life!—and do just what I bid you, or a shot shall crash your skull in as sure as my name is Cigarette!"

The little old Jew flew as fast as his limbs would

carry him, clutching the coins in his horny hands. He was terrified to a mortal anguish, and had not a thought of resisting or disobeying her; he knew the fame of Cigarette—as who did not? Knew that she would fire at a man as carelessly as at a cat, more carelessly in truth, for she favored cats, saving many from going into the Zouaves' soup-caldrons, and favored civilians not at all; and knew that at her rallying cry all the sabres about the town would be drawn without a second's deliberation, and sheathed in anything or anybody that had offended her, for Cigarette was, in her fashion, Generalissima of all the Regiments of Africa.

The dealer ran with all the speed of terror, and overtook Cecil, who was going slowly onward to the barracks.

"Are you serious?" he asked in surprise at the large amount, as the little Jew panted out apologies, entreaties, and protestations of his only having been in jest, and of his fervently desiring to buy the carvings at his own price, as he knew of a great collector in Paris to whom he needed to send them.

"Serious! Indeed am I serious, M. le Caporal," pleaded the curiosity-trader, turning his head in agonised fear to see if the vivandière's pistol was behind him. "The things will be worth a great deal to me where I shall send them, and though they are but bagatelles, what is Paris itself but one bagatelle? Pouf! they are all children there—they will love the toys. Take the money, I pray you, take the money!"

Cecil looked at him a moment; he saw the man was in earnest, and thought but little of his repentance and trepidation, for the citizens were all afraid of slighting or annoying a soldier.

"So be it. Thank you," he said, as he stretched out

his hand and took the coins, not without a keen pang of the old pride that would not wholly be stilled, yet gladly for the sake of the Chasseur dying yonder, growing delirious and wrenching the blood off his lungs in want of one touch of the ice, that was spoiled by the ton weight, to keep cool the wines and the fish of M. le Marquis de Châteauroy. And he went onward to spend the gold his sculptures had brought on some yellow figs and some cool golden grapes, and some ice-chilled wines that should soothe a little of the pangs of dissolution to his comrade, and bear him back a moment, if only in some fleeting dream, to the vine shadows and the tossing seas of corn, and the laughing, sunlit sweetness of his own fair country by the blue Biscayan waves.

"You did it? That is well. Now, see here—one word of me, now or ever after, and there is a little present that will come to you, hot and quick, from Cigarette," said the little Friend of the Flag, with a sententious sternness that crushed each word deliberately through her tight-set pearly teeth. The unhappy Jew shuddered and shut his eyes as she held a bullet close to his sight, then dropped it with an ominous thud in her pistol barrel.

"Not a syllable, never a syllable," he stammered; "and if I had known you were in love with him, *ma belle*——"

A box on the ears sent him across his own counter.

"In love? Parbleu! I detest the fellow!" said Cigarette, with fiery scorn and as hot an oath.

"Truly? Then why give your napoléons——?" began the bruised and stammering Israelite.

Cigarette tossed back her pretty head, that was curly and spirited and shapely as any thoroughbred spaniel's;

a superb glance flashed from her eyes, a superb disdain sat on her lips.

"You are a Jew-trader; you know nothing of our code under the tricolor. We—*nous autres soldats*—are too proud not to aid even an enemy when he is in the right, and France always arms for justice!"

With which magnificent peroration she swept all the carvings—they were rightfully hers—off the table.

"They will light my cooking fire!" she said contemptuously, as she vaulted lightly over the counter into the street, and pirouetted like a bit of fantoccini, that is wound up to waltz for ever, along the slope of the crowded Babazoum. All made way for her, even the mighty Spahis and the trudging Bedouin mules, for all knew that if they did not she would make it for herself, over their heads or above their prostrated bodies.

She whirled her way, like a gay-colored top set humming down a road, through the divers motley groups, singing at the top of her sweet mirthful voice, for she was angry with herself; and, for that, sang the more loudly the most wicked and *risqué* of her slang songs, that gave the morals of a Messalina in the language of a fish-wife, and yet had an inalienable, mischievous, contagious, dauntless French grace in it withal. Finally, she whirled herself into a dark deserted Moresco archway, a little out of the town, and dropped on a stone block, as a swallow, tired of flight, drops on to a bough.

"Is that the way I revenge myself? Ah, bah! I deserve to be killed! When he called me unsexed—unsexed—unsexed!"—and with each repetition of the infamous word, so bitter because vaguely admitted to be true, with her cheeks scarlet and her eyes aflame, and her hands clinched, she flung one of the ivory wreaths

on to the pavement and stamped on it with her spurred heel until the carvings were ground into powdered fragments—stamped, as though it were a living foe, and her steel-bound foot were treading out all its life with burning hate and pitiless venom.

In the act her passion exhausted itself, as the evil of such warm, impetuous, tender natures will; she was very still, and looked at the ruin she had done with regret and a touch of contrition.

"It was very pretty—and cost him weeks of labor, perhaps," she thought.

Then she took all the rest up, one by one, and gazed at them. Things of beauty had had but little place in her lawless young life; what she thought beautiful was a regiment sweeping out in full sunlight, with its eagles, and its colors, and its kettle-drums; what she held as music was the beat of the reveille and the mighty roll of the great artillery; what made her pulse throb and her heart leap was to see two fine opposing forces draw near for the onslaught and thunder of battle. Of things of grace she had no heed, though she had so much grace herself; and her life, though full of color, pleasure, and mischief, was as rough a one in most respects as any of her comrades'. These delicate artistic carvings were a revelation to her.

Here was the slender pliant spear of the river-reed; here the rich foliage of the wild fig-tree; here the beautiful blossom of the oleander; here fruit, and flower, and vine-leaf, and the pendulous ears of millet, twined together in their ivory semblance till they seemed to grow beneath her hands—and those little hands looked so brown and so powder-stained beside the pure snow whiteness of the wreaths! She touched them reverently

one by one; all the carvings had their beauty for her, but those of the flowers had far the most. She had never noted any flowers in her life before, save those she strung together for the Zephyrs on the Jour de Mazagran. Her youth was a military ballad, rhymed vivaciously to the rhythm of the Pas de Charge; but other or softer poetry had never by any chance touched her until now—now that in her tiny, bronzed, war-hardened palms lay the white foliage, the delicate art-trifles of this Chasseur, who bartered his talent to get a touch of ice for the burning lips of his doomed comrade.

"He is an aristocrat—he has such gifts as this—and yet he is in the ranks, has no country, is so poor that he is glad of a Jew's pittance, and must sell all this beauty to get a slice of melon for Léon Ramon!" she thought, while the silvery moon strayed in through a broken arch, and fell on an ivory coil of twisted lentiscus leaves and river grasses.

And, lost in a musing pity, Cigarette forgot her vow of vengeance.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Ivory Squadrons.

THE Chambrée of the Chasseurs was bright and clean in the morning light: in common with all Algerian barrack-rooms as unlike the barrack-rooms of the ordinary army as Cigarette, with her débonnaire devilry, smoking on a gun-wagon, was unlike a trim Normandy soubrette, sewing on a bench in the Tuileries gardens.

Disorder reigned supreme; but Disorder, although a dishevelled goddess, is very often a picturesque one, and more of an artist than her better-trained sisters; and the

disorder was brightened with a thousand vivid colors and careless touches that blent in confusion to enchant a painter's eyes. The room was crammed with every sort of spoil that the adventurous pillaging temper of the troopers could forage from Arab tents, or mountain caves, or river depths, or desert beasts and birds. All things, from tiger-skins to birds'-nests, from Bedouin weapons to ostrich-eggs, from a lion's mighty coat to a tobacco-stopper chipped out of a morsel of deal, were piled together, pell-mell, or hung against the whitewash walls, or suspended by cords from bed to bed. Everything that ingenuity and hardihood, prompted by the sharp spur of hunger, could wrest from the foe, from the country, from earth or water, from wild beasts or riven rock, was here in the midst of the soldiers' regimental pallets and regimental arms, making the Chambrée at once atelier, storehouse, workshop, and bazaar; while the men, cross-legged on their little hard couches, worked away with the zest of those who work for the few coins that alone will get them the food, the draught of wine, the hour's mirth and indulgence at the estaminet, to which they look across the long stern probation of discipline and manœuvre.

Skill, grace, talent, invention whose mother was necessity, and invention that was the unforced offshoot of natural genius, were all at work; and the hands that could send the naked steel down at a blow through turban and through brain could shape, with a woman's ingenuity, with a craftsman skill, every quaint device and dainty bijou from stone and wood, and many-colored feathers, and mountain berries, and all odds and ends that chance might bring to hand, and that the women of Bedouin tribes or the tourists of North Africa might hereafter buy with a wondrous tale appended to them,

racy and marvellous as the Sapir slang and the military imagination could weave, to enhance the toys' value, and get a few coins more on them for their manufacture.

Ignorance jostled art, and *bizarrerie* ran hand in hand with talent, in all the products of the Chasseurs' extemporized studio; but nowhere was there ever clumsiness, and everywhere was there an industry, gay, untiring, accustomed to make the best of the worst; the workers laughing, chattering, singing, in all good fellowship, while the fingers that gave the dead-thrust held the carver's chisel, and the eyes that glared blood-red in the heat of battle twinkled mischievously over the meerschaum bowl, in whose grinning form some great chief of the Bureaucratie had just been sculptured in audacious parody.

In the midst sat Rake, tattooing with an eastern skill the skin of a great lion, that a year before he had killed in single combat in the heart of Oran, having watched for the beast twelve nights in vain, high perched on a leafy crest of rock, above a water-course. While he worked, his tongue flew far and fast over the camp slang —the slangs of all nations came easy to him—in voluble conversation with the Chasseur next him, who was making a fan out of feathers that any Peeress might have signalled with at the Opera. "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort" was in high popularity with his comrades; and had said but the truth when he averred that he had never been so happy as under the tricolor. The officers pronounced him an incurably audacious "*pratique*;" he was always in mischief, and the regimental rules he broke through like a terrier through a gauze net; but they knew that when once the trumpets sounded Boot and Saddle, this yellow-haired dare-devil of an English fellow would be worth a score of more orderly soldiers, and that wherever

his adopted flag was carried, there would he be, first and foremost, in everything save retreat. The English service had failed to turn Rake to account; the French service made no such mistake, but knew that though this British bulldog might set his teeth at the leash and the lash, he would hold on like grim death in a fight, and live game to the last, if well handled.

Apart, at the head of the Chambrée, sat Cecil. The banter, the songs, the laughter, the chorus of tongues, went on unslackened by his presence. He had cordial sympathies with the soldiers: with those men who had been his followers in adversity and danger; and in whom he had found, despite all their occasional ferocity and habitual recklessness, traits and touches of the noblest instincts of humanity. His heart was with them always, as his purse, and his wine, and his bread were alike shared ever among them. He had learned to love them well—these wild wolf-dogs, whose fangs were so terrible to their foes, but whose eyes would still glisten at a kind word, and who would give a staunch fidelity unknown to tamer animals.

Living with them, one of them in all their vicissitudes, knowing all their vices, but knowing also all their virtues, owing to them many an action of generous nobility, and watching them in many an hour when their gallant self-devotion and their loyal friendships went far to redeem their lawless robberies and their ruthless crimes, he understood them thoroughly, and he could rule them more surely in their tempestuous evil, because he comprehended them so well in their mirth and in their better moods. When the grade of *sous-officier* gave him authority over them, they obeyed him implicity because they knew that his sympathies were with them at

all times, and that he would be the last to check their gaiety, or to punish their harmless indiscretions.

The warlike Roumis had always had a proud tenderness for their Bel-à-faire-peur, and a certain wondering respect for him; but they would not have adored him to a man, as they did, unless they had known that they might laugh without restraint before him, and confide any dilemma to him sure of aid, if aid were in his power.

The laughter, the work, and the clatter of conflicting tongues were at their height; Cecil sat, now listening, now losing himself in thought, while he gave the last touch to the carvings before him. They were a set of chessmen which it had taken him years to find materials for and to perfect; the white men were in ivory, the black in walnut, and were two opposing squadrons of French troops and of mounted Arabs. Beautifully carved, with every detail of costume rigid to truth, they were his master-piece, though they had only been taken up at any odd ten minutes that had happened to be unoccupied during the last three or four years. The chessmen had been about with him in so many places and under canvas so long, from the time that he chipped out their first Zouave pawn, as he lay in the broiling heat of Oran prostrate by a dry brook's stony channel, that he scarcely cared to part with them, and had refused to let Rake offer them for sale, with all the rest of the carvings. Stooping over them, he did not notice the doors open at the end of the Chambrée until a sudden silence that fell on the babble and uproar round him made him look up; then he rose and gave the salute with the rest of his discomfited and awe-stricken troopers. Châteauroy with a brilliant party had entered.

The Colonel flashed an eagle glance round.

"Fine discipline! You shall go and do this pretty work at Beylick!"

The soldiers stood like hounds that see the lash; they knew that he was like enough to carry out his threat; though they were doing no more than they had always tacit if not open permission to do. Cecil advanced, and fronted him.

"Mine is the blame, *mon Commandant!*"

He spoke simply, gently, boldly; standing with the ceremony that he never forgot to show to their chief, where the glow of African sunlight through the casement of the Chambrée fell full across his face, and his eyes met the dark glance of the "Black Hawk" unflinchingly. He never heeded that there was a gay, varied, numerous group behind Châteauroy; visitors who were looking over the barrack; he only heeded that his soldiers were unjustly attacked and menaced.

The Marquis gave a grim significant smile, that cut like so much cord of the scourge.

"*Ça va sans dire!* Wherever there is insubordination in the regiment the blame is very certain to be yours! Corporal Gaston, if you allow your *Chambrée* to be turned into the riot of a public fair you will soon find yourself degraded from the rank you so signally contrive to disgrace."

The words were far less than the tone they were spoken in, that gave them all the insolence of so many blows, as he swung on his heel and bent to the ladies of the party he escorted. Cecil stood mute; bearing the rebuke as it became a Corporal to bear his Commander's anger; a very keen observer might have seen that a faint flush rose over the sun tan of his face, and that his teeth clinched under his beard, but he let no other sign escape him.

The very self-restraint irritated Châteauroy, who would have been the first to chastise the presumption of a reply, had any been attempted.

"Back to your place, sir!" he said, with a wave of his hand, as he might have waved back a cur. "Teach your men the first formula of obedience at any rate!"

Cecil fell back in silence. With a swift warning glance at Rake—whose mouth was working, and whose forehead was hot as fire, where he clinched his lion-skin, and longed to be once free, to pull his chief down as lions pull in the death spring,—he went to his place at the farther end of the chamber and stood, keeping his eyes on the chess carvings, lest the control which was so bitter to retain should be broken if he looked on at the man who had been the curse and the antagonist of his whole life in Algeria.

He saw nothing and heard almost as little of all that went on around him; there had been a flutter of cloud-like color in his sight, a faint dreamy fragrance on the air, a sound of murmuring voices and of low laughter; he had known that some guests or friends of the Marquis's had come to view the barracks, but he never even glanced to see who or what they were. The passionate bitterness of just hatred, that he had to choke down as though it were the infamous instinct of some nameless crime, was on him.

The moments passed, the hum of the voices floated to his ear, the ladies of the party lingered by this soldier and by that, buying half the things in the chamber, filling their hands with all the quaint trifles, ordering the daggers and the flissas and the ornamented saddles and the desert skins to adorn their chateaux at home; and raining down on the troopers a shower of uncounted napoléons until the Chasseurs, who had begun to think

their trades would take them to Beylick, thought instead that they had drifted into dreams of El Dorado. He never looked up; he heard nothing, heeded nothing; he was dreamily wondering whether he should always be able so to hold his peace, and to withhold his arm, that he should never strike his tyrant down with one blow, in which all the opprobrium of years should be stamped out? A voice woke him from his reverie.

"Are those beautiful carvings yours?"

He looked up, and in the gloom of the alcove where he stood, where the sun did not stray, and two great rugs of various skins, with some conquered banners of Bedouins, hung like a black pall, he saw a woman's eyes resting on him; proud, lustrous eyes, a little haughty, very thoughtful, yet soft withal, as the deepest hue of deep waters. He bowed to her with the old grace of manner that had so amused and amazed the little vivandière.

"Yes, madame, they are mine."

"Ah!—what wonderful skill!"

She took the White King, an Arab Sheik on his charger, in her hand, and turned to those about her, speaking of its beauties and its workmanship in a voice low, very melodious, ever so slightly languid, that fell on Cecil's ear like a chime of long-forgotten music. Twelve years had drifted by since he had been in the presence of a high-bred woman, and those lingering, delicate tones had the note of his dead past.

He looked at her; at the gleam of the brilliant hair, at the arch of the proud brows, at the dreaming, imperial eyes; it was a face singularly dazzling, impressive and beautiful at all times; most so of all in the dusky shadows of the waving desert banners, and the rough, rude, bar-

baric life of the Caserne, where a fille de joie or a cantinière were all of her sex that was ever seen, and those —poor wretches!—were hardened, and bronzed, and beaten, and brandy-steeped out of all likeness to the fairness of women.

"You have an exquisite art. They are for sale?" she asked him: she spoke with the careless gracious courtesy of a *grande dame* to a Corporal of Chasseurs, looking little at him, much at the ivory Kings and their mimic hosts of Zouaves and Bedouins.

"They are at your service, madame."

"And their price?" She had been purchasing largely of the men on all sides as she had swept down the length of the Chambrée, and she drew out some French bank-notes as she spoke. Never had the bitterness of poverty smitten him as it smote him now when this young patrician offered him her gold! Old habits vanquished; he forgot who and where he now was; he bowed as in other days he had used to bow in the circle of St. James's.

"Is—the honor of your acceptance, if you will deign to give that."

He forgot that he was not as he once had been. He forgot that he stood but as a private of the French army before an aristocrat whose name he had never heard.

She turned and looked at him, which she had never done before, so absorbed had she been in the chessmen, and so little did a Chasseur of the ranks pass into her thoughts. There was an extreme of surprise, there was something of offence, and there was still more of coldness in her glance; a proud, languid, astonished coldness of regard, though it softened slightly as she saw that he had spoken in all courtesy of intent.

She bent her graceful regal head.

"I thank you. Your very clever work can of course only be mine by purchase."

And with that she laid aside the White King among his little troop of ivory Arabs, and floated onward with her friends. Cecil's face paled slightly under the mellow tint left there by the desert sun and the desert wind; he swept the chessmen into their walnut case and thrust them out of sight under his knapsack. Then he stood motionless as a sentinel, with the great leopard skins and Bedouin banners behind him, casting a gloom that the gold points on his harness could scarcely break in its heavy shadow, and never moved till the echo of the voices, and the cloud of the draperies, and the fragrance of perfumed laces, and the brilliancy of the staff officers' uniforms had passed away, and left the soldiers alone in their Chambrée. Those careless, cold words from a woman's lips had cut him deeper than the *matraque* could have cut him, though it had bruised his loins and lashed his breast; they showed all he had lost.

"What a fool I am still!" he thought, as he made his way out of the barrack-room. "I might have fairly forgotten by this time that I ever had the rights of a gentleman."

So the carvings had won him one warm heart and one keen pang that day;—the vivandière forgave, the aristocrat stung him, by means of those snowy, fragile, artistic toys that he had shaped in lonely nights under canvas by ruddy picket-fires, beneath the shade of wild fig-trees, and in the stir and color of Bedouin encampments.

"I must ask to be ordered out of the city," he thought, as he pushed his way through the crowds of soldiers and civilians. "Here I get bitter, restless, impatient; here

the past is always touching me on the shoulder; here I shall soon grow to regret, and to chafe, and to look back like any pining woman. Out yonder there, with no cares to think of but my horse and my troop, I am a soldier —and nothing else: so best. I shall be nothing else as long as I live. Pardieu, though! I don't know what one wants better: it is a good life, as life goes. One must not turn compliments to great ladies, that is all;—not much of a deprivation there. The chessmen are the better for that; her Maltese dog would have broken them all the first time it upset their table!"

He laughed a little as he went on smoking his *brûle-gueule*, the old carelessness, mutability, and indolent philosophies were with him still, and were still inclined to thrust away and glide from all pain as it arose. Though much of gravity and of thoughtfulness had stolen on him, much of insouciance remained; and there were times when there was not a more reckless or a more nonchalant *lion* in all the battalions than "Bel-à-faire-peur." Under his gentleness there was "wild blood" in him still, and the wildness was not tamed by the fiery champagne-draught of the perilous, adventurous years he spent.

"I wonder if I shall *never* teach the Black Hawk that he may strike his beak in once too far?" he pondered, with a sudden darker, graver touch of musing; and involuntarily he stretched his arm out, and looked at the wrist, supple as Damascus steel, and at the muscles that were traced beneath the skin, as he thrust the sleeve up, clear, firm, and sinewy as any athlete's. He doubted his countenance there, fast rein as he held all rebellion in, close shield as he bound to him against his own passions in the breastplate of a soldier's first duty—obedience.

He shook the thought off him as he would have shaken a snake. It had a terrible temptation—a tempta-

tion which he knew might any day overmaster him; and Cecil, who all through his life had certain inborn instincts of honor, which served him better than most codes or creeds served their professors, was resolute to follow the military religion of obedience enjoined in the Service that had received him at his needs, and to give no precedent in his own person that could be fraught with dangerous, rebellious allurement for the untamed, chafing, red-hot spirits of his comrades, for whom he knew insubordination would be ruin and death—whose one chance of reward, of success, and of a higher ambition, lay in their implicit subordination to their chiefs, and their continuous resistance of every rebellious impulse.

Cecil had always thought very little of himself.

In his most brilliant and pampered days he had always considered in his own heart that he was a graceless fellow, not worth his salt, and had occasionally wondered, in a listless sort of way, why so useless a *bagatelle à la mode* as his own life was had ever been created. He thought much the same now; but following his natural instincts, which were always the instincts of a gentleman, of a generous temper, he did, unconsciously, make his life of much value among its present comrades.

His influence had done more to humanize the men he was associated with than any preachers or teachers could have done. The most savage and obscene brute in the ranks with him caught something gentler and better from the "aristocrat." His refined habits, his serene temper, his kindly forbearance, his high instinctive honor, made themselves felt imperceptibly, but surely; they knew that he was as fearless in war, as eager for danger as themselves, they knew that he was no saint, but loved the smile of women's eyes, the flush of wines, and the excitation of gaming hazards as well as they did; and hence

his influence had a weight that probably a more strictly virtuous man's would have strained for, and missed for ever. The coarsest ruffian felt ashamed to make an utter beast of himself before the calm eyes of the patrician. The most lawless *pratique* felt a lie halt on his lips when the contemptuous glance of his gentleman-comrade taught him that falsehood was poltroonery. Blasphemous tongues learnt to rein in their filthiness when this "*beau lion*" sauntered away from the picket-fire, on an icy night, to be out of hearing of their witless obscenities. More than once the weight of his arm and the slash of his sabre had called them to account in fiery fashion for their brutality to women or their thefts from the country people, till they grew aware that "Bel-à-faire-peur" would risk having all their swords buried in him rather than stand by to see injustice done.

And throughout his corps men became unconsciously gentler, juster, with a finer sense of right and wrong, and less bestial modes of pleasure, of speech, and of habit, because he was among them. Moreover, the keen-eyed desperadoes who made up the chief sum of his comrades saw that he gave unquestioning respect to a chief who made his life a hell; and rendered unquestioning submission under affronts, tyrannies, and insults which, as they also saw, stung him to the quick, and tortured him as no physical torture would have done—and the sight was not without a strong effect for good on them. They could tell that he suffered under these as they never suffered themselves, yet he bore them and did his duty with a self-control and patience they had never attained.

Almost insensibly they grew ashamed to be beaten by him, and strove to grow like him as far as they could. They never knew him drunk, they never heard him swear, they never found him unjust, even to a poverty-stricken

indigène, or brutal, even to a *fille de joie*. Insensibly his presence humanized them. Of a surety, the last part Bertie dreamed of playing was that of a teacher to any mortal thing—yet—here in Africa, it might reasonably be questioned if a second Augustine or Francis Xavier would ever have done half the good among the devil-may-care Roumis that was wrought by the dauntless, listless, reckless soldier who followed instinctively the one religion which has no cant in its brave simple creed, and binds man to man in links that are true as steel—the religion of a gallant gentleman's loyalty and honor.

CHAPTER XX.

Cigarette en Conseil et Cachette.

"CORPORAL VICTOR, M. le Commandant desires you to present yourself at his *campagne* to-night, at ten precisely, with all your carvings;—above all, with the chessmen."

The swift sharp voice of a young officer of his regiment wakened Cecil from his musing, as he went on his way down the crowded, tortuous, stifling street. He had scarcely time to catch the sense of the words, and to halt, giving the salute, before the Chasseur's skittish little Barbary mare had galloped past him, scattering the people right and left, knocking over a sweetmeat seller, upsetting a string of maize-laden mules, jostling a venerable marabout on to an impudent little grisette, and laming an old Moor as he tottered to his mosque, without any apology for any of the mischief, in the customary insolence, which makes "Roumis" and "Bureaucratie" alike execrated by the indigenous populace with a detestation that the questionable benefits of civilized importations can do very

little to counterbalance in the fiery breasts of the sons of the soil.

Cecil involuntarily stood still. His face darkened. All orders that touched on the service, even where harshest and most unwelcome, he had taught himself to take without any hesitation, till he now scarcely felt the check of the steel curb; but to be ordered thus like a lackey—to take his wares thus like a hawker!

"*Ah ma cantche!* We are soldiers, not traders—aren't we? You don't like that, M. Victor? You are no pedler—eh? And you think you would rather risk being court-martialled and shot, than take your ivory toys for the Black Hawk's talons?"

Cecil glanced up in astonishment at the divination and translation of his thoughts, to encounter the bright falcon eyes of Cigarette looking down on him from a little oval casement above, dark as pitch within, and whose embrasure, with its rim of gray stone coping, set off like a picture-frame, with a heavy background of unglazed Rembrandt shadow, the piquant head of the Friend of the Flag, with her pouting, scarlet, mocking lips, and her mischievous challenging smile, and her dainty little gold-banded foraging-cap set on curls as silken and jetty as any black Irish setters.

"*Bon jour, ma belle!*" he answered, with a little weariness, lifting his fez to her with a certain sense of annoyance, that this young Bohemian of the barracks, this child with her slang and her satire, should always be in his way like a shadow.

"*Bon jour, mon brave!*" returned Cigarette, contemptuously. "We are not so ceremonious as all that in Algiers! Good fellow, you should be a chamberlain, not a corporal. What fine manners, mon Dieu!"

She was incensed, and piqued, and provoked. She had been ready to forgive him because he carved so wonderfully, and sold the carvings for his comrade at the hospital; she was holding out the olive-branch after her own petulant fashion; and she thought, if he had had any grace in him, he would have responded with some such florid compliment as those for which she was accustomed to box the ears of her admirers, and would have swung himself up to the coping, to touch, or at least try to touch, those sweet, fresh, crimson lips of hers, that were like a half-opened damask rose. Modesty is apt to go to the wall in camps, and poor little Cigarette's notions of the great passion were very simple, rudimentary, and, certes, in no way coy. How should they be? She had tossed about with the army, like one of the tassels to their standards, blowing which ever way the breath of war floated her, and had experienced, or thought she had experienced, as many *affaires* as the veriest Don Juan among them, though her heart had never been much concerned in them, but had beaten scarce a shade quicker, if a lunge in a duel, or a shot from an Indigène had pounced off with her hero of the hour to Hades.

"Fine manners!" echoed Cecil, with a smile: "my poor child, have you been so buffeted about that you have never been treated with commonest courtesy?"

"Whew!" cried the little lady, blowing a puff of smoke down on him. "None of your pity for me, my *ci-devant!* Buffeted about? *Nom du diable!* do you suppose anybody ever did anything with *me* that I didn't choose? If you had as much power as I have in the army, Châteauroy would not send for you to sell your toys like a pedler. You are a slave! I am a sovereign!"

With which she tossed back her graceful, spirited head, as though the gold band of her cap were the gold band of a diadem. She was very proud of her station in the Army of Africa, and glorified her privileges with all a child's vanity.

He listened, amused with her boastful supremacy; but the last words touched him with a certain pang just in that moment. He felt like a slave—a slave who must obey his tyrant, or go out and die like a dog.

"Well, yes," he said, slowly, "I am a slave, I fear. I wish a Bedouin flissa would cut my thralls in two."

He spoke jestingly, but there was a tinge of sadness in the words that touched Cigarette's changeful temper to contrition, and filled her with the same compassion and wonder at him that she had felt when the ivory wreaths and crucifixes had laid in her hands. She knew she had been ungenerous—a crime dark as night in the sight of the little chivalrous soldier.

"*Tiens!*" she said, softly and waywardly, winding her way aright with that penetration and tact which, however unsexed in other things, Cigarette had kept thoroughly feminine. "That was but an idle word of mine: forgive it, and forget it. You are not a slave when you fight in the *fantasias*. Morbleu! they say to see you kill a man is beautiful—so workmanlike! And you would go out and be shot to-morrow, rather than sell your honor, or stain it—eh? Bah! while you know they should cut your heart out rather than make you tell a lie, or betray a comrade, you are no slave, my *galonné;* you have the best freedom of all. Take a glass of champagne? Prut-tut! how you look! Oh, the *demoiselles*, with the silver necks, are not barrack drink, of course; but I drink champagne always myself. This is M. le Prince's. He knows I only take the best brands."

With which Cigarette, leaning down from her casement, whose sill was about a foot above his head, tendered her peace-offering in a bottle of Cliquot, three of which, packed in her knapsack, she had carried off from the luncheon-table of a Russian Prince who was touring through Algiers, and who had half lost his Grand Ducal head after the bewitching, dauntless, capricious, unattachable, unpurchasable, and coquettish little fire-eater of the Spahis, who treated him with infinitely more insolence and indifference than she would show to some battered old veteran, or some worn-out old dog, who had passed through the great Kabaila raids and battles.

"You will go to your Colonel's to-night?" she said questioningly, as he drank the champagne, and thanked her—for he saw the spirit in which the gift was tendered—as he leaned against the half-ruined Moorish wall, with its blue and white striped awning spread over both their heads in the little street whose crowds, chatter, thousand eyes, and incessant traffic no way troubled Cigarette, who had talked *argot* to monarchs undaunted, and who had been one of the chief sights in a hundred grand reviews ever since she had been perched on a gun-carriage at five years old, and paraded with a troop of horse artillery in the Champ de Mars, as having gone through the whole of Bugeaud's campaign, at which parade, by-the-way, being tendered sweetmeats by a famous General's wife, Cigarette had made the immortal reply, in lisping sabir: "*Madame, mes bonbons sont des boulets!*"*

She repeated her question imperiously, as Cecil kept silent: "You will go to-night?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He did not care to discuss his Colonel's orders with this pretty little Bacchante.

* Madame, my sweetmeats are bullets!

"Oh, a chief's command, you know——"

"A fico for a chief!" retorted Cigarette impatiently. "Why don't you say the truth? You are thinking you will disobey, and risk the rest!"

"Well, why not? I grant his right in barrack and field, but——"

He spoke rather to himself than her, and his thoughts, as he spoke, went back to the scene of the morning. He felt, with a romantic impulse that he smiled at even as it passed over him, that he would rather have half a dozen muskets fired at him in the death-sentence of a mutineer than meet again the glance of those proud azure eyes sweep over him, in their calm indifference to a private of Chasseurs, their calm ignorance that he could be wounded or be stung.

"But?" echoed Cigarette, leaning out of her oval hole, perched in the quaint, gray, Moresco wall, parti-colored with broken encaustics of varied hues. "*Chut, bon camarade!* that little word has been the undoing of the world ever since the world began. 'But' is a blank cartridge, and never did anything but miss fire yet. Shoot dead, or don't aim at all, whichever you like; but never make a *coup manqué** with 'but!' So you won't obey Châteauroy in this?"

He was silent again. He would not answer falsely, and he did not care to say his thoughts to her.

"'No,'" pursued Cigarette, translating his silence at her fancy, "you say to yourself, 'I am an aristocrat—I will not be ordered in this thing,'—you say. 'I am a good soldier: I will not be sent for like a hawker,'—you say. 'I was noble once: I will show my blood at last, if I die!' Ah!—you say that!"

* False stroke.

He laughed a little as he looked up at her.

"Not exactly that, but something as foolish perhaps. Are you a witch, my pretty one?"

"Whoever doubted it, except you?"

She looked one, in truth, whom few men could resist, bending to him out of her owl's nest, with the flash of the sun under the blue awning brightly catching the sunny brown of her soft cheek and the cherry bloom of her lips, arched, pouting, and coquette. She set her teeth sharply, and muttered a hot, heavy *sacré*, or even something worse, as she saw that his eyes had not even remained on her, but were thoughtfully looking down the checkered light and color of the street. She was passionate, she was vain, she was wayward, she was fierce as a little velvet leopard, as a handsome, brilliant plumaged hawk; she had all the faults, as she had all the virtues, of the thorough Celtic race; and, for the moment, she had an instinct, fiery, ruthless, and full of hate, to draw the pistol out of her belt, and teach him with a shot, crash through heart or brain, that girls who were "unsexed" could keep enough of the woman in them not to be neglected with impunity, and could lose enough of it to be able to avenge the negligence by a summary vendetta. But she was a haughty little condottière in her fashion. She would not ask for what was not offered her, nor give a rebuke that might be traced to mortification. She only set her two rosebud lips in as firm a line of wrath and scorn as ever Cæsar's or Napoleon's moulded themselves into, and spoke in the curt, imperious, generalissimo fashion with which Cigarette before now had rallied a demoralized troop, reeling drunk and mad away from a razzia.

"I am a witch! That is, I can put two and two together, and read men, though I don't read the alphabet.

Well, one reading is a good deal rarer than the other. So you mean to disobey the Hawk to-night? I like you for that. But listen here—did you ever hear them talk of Marquise?"

"No!"

"Parbleu!" swore the vivandière in her wrath, "you look on at a bamboula as if it were only a bear-cub dancing, and can only give one 'yes' and 'no,' as if one were a drummer-boy. Bah! are those your Paris courtesies?"

"Forgive me, *ma belle!* I thought you called yourself our comrade, and would have no 'fine manners.' There is no knowing how to please you."

He might have pleased her simply and easily enough if he had only looked up with a shade of interest to that most picturesque picture, bright as a pastoral portrait that was hung above him in the old tumble-down Moorish stone-work. But his thoughts were with other things; and a love scene with this fantastic young Amazon did not attract him. The warm, ripe, mellow little wayside cherry hung directly in his path, with the sun on its bloom, and the free wind tossing it merrily; but it had no charm for him. He was musing rather on that costly, delicate, brilliant-hued, hot-house blossom that could only be reached down by some rich man's hand, and grew afar on heights where never winter chills, nor summer tan, could come too rudely on it.

"Come, tell me what is Marquise?—a kitten?" he went on, leaning his arm still on the sill of her embrasure, and willing to coax her out of her anger.

"A kitten!" echoed Cigarette contemptuously. "You think me a child, I suppose?"

"Surely you are not far off it?"

"Mon Dieu! why, *I* was never a child in my life," retorted Cigarette, waxing sunny-tempered and confidential again, while she perched herself, like some gay-feathered mocking-bird on a branch, on the window-sill itself. "When I was two, I used to be beaten like a Turco that pawns his musket; when I was three, I used to scrape up the cigar ends the officers dropped about to sell them again for a bit of black bread; when I was four, I knew all about Philippe Durron's escape from Beylick, and bit my tongue through, to say nothing, when my mother flogged me with a tringlo's mule-whip, because I would not tell, that she might tell again at the Bureau, and get the reward. A child?—diantre! before I was two feet high I had winged my first *Arbi*. He stole a rabbit I was roasting. Presto! how quick he dropped it when my ball broke his wrist like a twig."

And the Friend of the Flag laughed gaily at the recollection, as at the best piece of mirth with which memory could furnish her.

"But you asked about Marquise? Well, he was what you are, a hawk among carrion crows, a gentleman in the ranks. Dieu! how handsome he was! Nobody ever knew his real name, but they thought he was of Austrian breed, and we called him Marquise because he was so womanish white in his skin and so dainty in all his ways. Just like you! Marquise could fight, fight like a hundred devils; and—pouf!—how proud he was; very much like you altogether! Now, one day something went wrong in the exercise-ground. Marquise was not to blame, but they thought he was; and an adjutant struck him—flick, flack, like that—across the face with a riding-switch. Marquise had his bayonet fixed—he belonged to the Turcos—and before we knew what was up, crash the blade went through—through the breast-bone, and

out at the spine—and the adjutant fell as dead as a cat, with the blood spouting out like a fountain. 'I come of a great race, that never took insult without giving back death,' was all that Marquise said when they seized him and brought him to judgment; and he would never say of what race that was. They shot him—ah, bah! discipline must be kept—and I saw him with five great wounds in his chest, and his beautiful golden hair all soiled with the sand and the powder, lying there by the open grave, that they threw him into as if he were offal; and we never knew more of him than that."

Cigarette's radiant laugh had died, and her careless voice had sunk, over the latter words. As the little vivacious brunette told the tale of a nameless life, it took its eloquence from her, simple and brief as her speech was, and it owned a deeper pathos because the reckless young Bacchante of the As de Pique grew grave one moment while she told it. Then, grave still, she leaned her brown, bright face nearer down from her oval hole in the wall.

"Now," she whispered very low, "if you mutiny once, they will shoot you just like Marquise, and you will die just as silent, like him."

"Well," he answered her slowly, "why not? Death is no great terror; I risk it every day for the sake of a common soldier's rations, why should I not chance it for the sake and in the defence of my honor?"

"Bah! men sell their honor for their daily bread all the world over!" said Cigarette with the satire that had treble raciness from the slang in which she clothed it. "But it is not you alone. See here—one example set on your part, and half your regiment will mutiny too. It is bitter work to obey the Black Hawk, and if you give the

signal of revolt, three parts of your comrades will join you. Now what will that end in, *beau lion*—eh?"

"Tell me—you are a soldier yourself, you say."

"Yes, I am a soldier!" said Cigarette between her tight-set teeth, while her eyes lightened, and her voice sank down into a whisper that had a certain terrible meaning in it, like the first dropping of the scattered opening shots in the distance before a great battle commences; "and I have seen war, not holiday war, but war in earnest—war when men fall like hailstones, and tear like tigers, and choke like mad dogs with their throats full of blood and sand; when the gun-carriage wheels go crash over the writhing limbs, and the horses charge full gallop over the living faces, and the hoofs beat out the brains before death has stunned them senseless. Oh, yes! I am a soldier, and I will tell you one thing I have seen. I have seen soldiers mutiny, a squadron of them, because they hated their chief and loved two of their sous-officiers; and I have seen the end of it all—a few hundred men, blind and drunk with despair, at bay against as many thousands, and walled in with four lines of steel and artillery, and fired on from a score of cannon-mouths—volley on volley, like the thunder—till not one living man was left, and there was only a shapeless, heaving, moaning mass, with the black smoke over all. That is what I have seen; you will not make me see it again?"

Her face was very earnest, very eloquent, very dark, and tender with thought; there was a vein of grave, even of intense feeling, that ran through the significant words to which tone and accent lent far more meaning than lay in their mere phrases; the little Bohemian lost her insolence when she pleaded for her "children," her comrades; and the mischievous pet of the camp never treated

lightly what touched the France that she loved, the France that alone of all things in her careless life she held in honor and reverence.

"You will not make me see it again?" she said, once more leaning out, with her eyes, that were like a brown brook sparkling deep yet bright in the sun, fixed on him. "They would rise at your bidding, and they would be mowed down like corn. You will not?"

"Never! I give you my word."

The promise was from his heart. He would have endured any indignity, any outrage, rather than have drawn into ruin, through him, the fiery, fearless, untutored lives of the men who marched, and slept, and rode, and fought, and lay in the light of the picket-fires, and swept down through the hot sand storms on to the desert foe by his side. Cigarette stretched out her hand to him—that tiny brown hand, which, small though it was, had looked so burnt and so hard beside the delicate, fairy ivory carvings of his workmanship—stretched it out with a frank, winning, childlike, soldierlike grace.

"*C'est ça, tu es bon soldat!*"*

He bent over the hand she held to his in the courtesy natural with him to all her sex, and touched it lightly with his lips.

"Thank you, my little comrade," he said simply, with the graver thought still on him that her relation and her entreaty had evoked, "you have given me a lesson that I shall not be quick to forget."

Cigarette was the wildest little bacchanal that ever pirouetted for the delight of half a score of soldiers in their shirt-sleeves and half-drunk; she was the most reck-

* That's right! You are a true soldier.

less coquette that ever made the roll-call of her lovers range from prince-marshals to ploughboy conscripts; she had flirted as far and wide as the butterfly flirts with the blossoms it flutters on to through the range of a summer-day; she took kisses, if the giver of them were handsome, as readily as a child takes sweetmeats at Mardi Gras; and of feminine honor, feminine scruples, feminine delicacy, knew nothing save by such very dim, fragmentary instincts as nature still planted in scant growth amid the rank soil and the pestilent atmosphere of camp-life. Her eyes had never sunk, her face had never flushed, her heart had never panted for the boldest or the wildest wooer of them all, from M. le Duc's Lauzun-esque blandishments to Pouffer-de-Rire's or Miou-Miou's rough overtures; she had the coquetry of her nation with the audacity of a boy. Now only, for the first time, Cigarette colored hotly at the grave, graceful, distant salute, so cold and so courteous, which was offered her in lieu of the rude and boisterous familiarities to which she was accustomed; and drew her hand away with what was, to the shame of her soldierly hardihood and her barrack tutelage, very nearly akin to an impulse of shyness.

"*Dam! Ne me donnez de la gabatine!** I am not a court lady, *bon-zig!*" she cried hastily, almost petulantly, to cover the unwonted and unwelcome weakness; while, to make good the declaration and revindicate her military renown, she balanced herself lightly on the stone ledge of her oval hole, and sprang, with a young wildcat's easy, vaulting leap, over his head, and over the heads of the people beneath, on to the ledge of the house opposite, a low-built wine-shop, whose upper story nearly touched the leaning walls of the old Moorish buildings in which she

* Stuff! Don't humbug me!"

had been perched. The crowd in the street below looked up amazed and aghast at that bound from casement to casement as she flew over their heads like a blue-and-scarlet-winged bird of Oran; but they laughed as they saw who it was.

"It is Cigarette!" growled a Turco Indigène. "Ah-ha! the devil, for a certainty, must have been her father!"

"To be sure!" cried the Friend of the Flag, looking from her elevation; "he is a very good father, too, and I don't tease him like his sons the priests! But I have told him to take *you*, Ben Arsli, the next time you are stripping a dead body; so look out—he won't have to wait long."

The discomfited Indigène hustled his way, with many an oath, through the laughing crowd as best he might, and Cigarette, with an airy pirouette on the wine-shop's roof that would have done honor to any opera boards, and was executed as carelessly, twenty feet above earth, as if she had been a pantomime-dancer all her days, let herself down by the awning, hand over hand like a little *mousse* from the harbor, jumped on to a forage-wagon that was just passing full trot down the street, and disappeared, standing on the piles of hay, and singing to the driving *tringlos'* unutterable delight the stanzas of Béranger's "*Infidelités de Lisette;*" her lithe, slender, miniature form, with its flash of gold on the breast, and its strip of rich scarlet in the fluttering sash, rising out against the blue and burning sky, the glare of the white walls, and the dusky glow and movement of the ebbing and flowing crowd.

Cecil looked after her with a certain touch of pity for her in him.

"What a gallant boy is spoilt in that little Amazon!"

he thought; the quick flush of her face, the quick withdrawal of her hand, he had not noticed; she had not much interest for him—scarcely any, indeed,—save that he saw she was pretty, with a mignonne mischievous face, that all the sun-tan of Africa and all the wild life of the Caserne could not harden or debase. But he was sorry a child so bright and so brave should be turned into three parts a trooper as she was, should have been tossed up on the scum and filth of the lowest barrack life, and should be doomed in a few years' time to become the yellow, battered, foul-mouthed, vulture-eyed camp-follower that premature old age would surely render the darling of the tricolor, the pythoness of the As de Pique.

Cigarette was making scorn of her doom of Sex, dancing it down, drinking it down, laughing it down, burning it out in tobacco fumes, drowning it in trembling cascades of wine, trampling it to dust under the cancan by her little brass-bound boots, mocking it away with her slang jests, and her Theresa songs, and her devil-may-care audacities, till there was scarce a trace of it left in this prettiest and wildest little scamp of all the Army of Africa. But strive to kill it how she would, her sex would have its revenge one day and play Nemesis to her.

She was bewitching now—bewitching, though she had no witchery for him, in her youth. But when the bloom should leave her brown cheeks, and the laughter die out of her lightning glance, the womanhood she had defied would assert itself, and avenge itself, and be hideous in the sight of the men who now loved the tinkling of those little spurred feet, and shouted with applause to hear the reckless barrack-blasphemies ring their mirth from that fresh mouth which was now like a bud from a damask rose branch, though even now it steeped itself in wine, and sullied itself with oaths, and seared itself with smoke,

and had never been touched from its infancy with any kiss that was innocent, not even with its mother's.

And there was a deep tinge of pity for her in Cecil's thoughts as he watched her out of sight, and then strolled across to the café opposite to finish his cigar beneath its orange-striped awning. The child had been flung upward, a little straw floating in the gutter of Paris iniquities; a little foam-bell bubbling on the sewer waters of barrack-vice; the stick had been her teacher, the baggage-wagon her cradle, the camp-dogs her playfellows, the *caserne* * oaths her lullaby, the *guidons* ** her sole guiding-stars, the *razzia* *** her sole fête day; it was little marvel that the bright, bold, insolent little Friend of the Flag had nothing left of her sex save a kitten's mischief and a coquette's archness. It said much rather for the straight, fair, sunlit instincts of the untaught nature that Cigarette had gleaned, even out of such a life, two virtues that she would have held by to the death, if tried: a truthfulness that would have scorned a lie as only fit for cowards, and a loyalty that cleaved to France as a religion.

Cecil thought that a gallant boy was spoiled in this eighteen-year old brunette of a campaigner; he might have gone further, and said that a hero was lost.

"Voilà!" said Cigarette between her little teeth.

She stood in the glittering Algerine night, brilliant with a million stars, and balmy with a million flowers, before the bronze trellised gate of the villa on the Sahel, where Châteauroy, when he was not on active service—which chanced rarely, for he was one of the finest soldiers and most daring chiefs in Africa—indemnified himself with the magnificence that his private fortune enabled

* Barrack. ** Standards. *** Raid.

him to enjoy, for the unsparing exertions and the rugged privations that he always shared willingly with the lowest of his soldiers. It was the grandest trait in the man's character that he utterly scorned the effeminacy which many commanders provided for their table, their comfort, and their gratification while campaigning, and would commonly neither take himself nor allow to his officers any more indulgence on the march than his troopers themselves enjoyed. But his villa on the Sahel was a miniature palace; it had formerly been the harem of a great Rais, and the gardens were as enchanting as the interior was, if something florid, still as elegant as Paris art and Paris luxury could make it; for ferocious as the Black Hawk was in war, and well as he loved the chase and the slaughter, he did not disdain, when he had whetted beak and talons to satiety, to smooth his ruffled plumage in downy nests and under caressing hands.

To-night the windows of the pretty, low, snow-white, far-stretching building were lighted and open, and through the wilderness of cactus, myrtle, orange, citron, fuchsia, and a thousand flowers that almost buried it under their weight of leaf and blossom, a myriad of lamps were gleaming like so many glow-worms beneath the foliage, while from a cedar grove some slight way farther out, the melodies and overtures of the best military bands in Algiers came mellowed, though not broken, by the distance and the fall of the bubbling fountains. Cigarette looked and listened, and her gay, brown face grew duskily warm with wrath.

"Ah, bah!" she muttered as she pressed her pretty lips to the lattice-work. "The men die like murrained sheep in the hospital, and get sour bread tossed to them

as if they were pigs, and are thrashed if they pawn their muskets for a stoup of drink when their throats are as dry as the desert—and *you* live like a *coq en pâte!** Morbleu! what fools the people are to fight, and toil, and get their limbs broken, and have their brains dashed out by spent balls, that M. le Maréchal may send home a grand story with his own name flaring in letters a yard long on the placards, and M. le Colonel gives his fêtes with stars and ribbons on his breast, while those who won the battle lie rotting in the sand!"

Cigarette was a resolute little democrat; she had loaded the carbines behind the barricade in an émeute in Paris before she was ten years old, and was not seldom in the perplexity of conflicting creeds when her loyalty to the tricolor and the guidons smote with a violent clash on her love for the populace and their liberty. She was given, however, usually to reconciling the dilemma with all her sex's illogical ingenuity, and so far thoroughly carried out her republicanism that she boxed a Prince's ear without ceremony when one tried to subjugate her, and never by any chance veiled the sun of her smiles to her "children," the troopers—not even when she was tired to death after a burning march across leagues on leagues of locust-wasted country, or had spent half the night, after a skirmish, dressing wounds, soothing fever, seeking out the dying men who lay scattered on the outskirts of the field of carnage, with a magic, and a sweetness, and a patience that seemed rather fitting for the gentle *Sœurs Grises* than for the wayward, mischievous, insolent young reveller of the *As de Pique*.

* In clover.

She looked a moment longer through the gilded scroll-work; then, as she had done once before, thrust her pistols well within her sash that they should not catch upon the boughs, and pushing herself through the prickly cactus hedge, impervious to anything save herself or a Barbary marmoset, twisted with marvellous ingenuity through the sharp-pointed leaves, and the close barriers of spines, and launched herself with inimitable dexterity on to the other side of the cacti. Cigarette had too often played a game at spying and reconnoitering for her regiments, and played it with a cleverness that distanced even the most *rusé* of the Zephyrs, not to be able to do just whatever she chose, in taking the way she liked, and lurking unseen at discretion.

She crossed the breadth of the grounds under the heavy shade of arbutus-trees with a hare's fleetness, and stood a second looking at the open windows and the terraces that lay before them, brightly lighted by the summer moon and by the lamps that sparkled among the shrubs. Then down she dropped, as quickly, as lightly, as a young setter down charging among the ferns, into a shower of rhododendrons, whose rose and lilac blossoms shut her wholly within them like a fairy inclosed in bloom. The good fairy of one life there she was assuredly, though she might be but a devil-may-care, audacious, careless little feminine Belphégor and military Asmodeus.

"Ah!" she said, quickly and sharply, with a deep-drawn breath. The single ejaculation was at once a menace, a tenderness, a whirlwind of rage, a volume of disdain, a world of pity. It was intensely French, and the whole nature of Cigarette was in it.

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Yet all she saw was a small and brilliant group sauntering to and fro before the open windows, after dinner, listening to the bands, which, through dinner, had played to them, and laughing low and softly; and, at some distance from them, beneath the shade of a cedar, the figure of a Corporal of Chasseurs, calm, erect, motionless, as though he were the figure of a soldier cast in bronze. The scene was simple enough, though very picturesque; but it told, by its vivid force of contrast, a whole history to Cigarette.

"A true soldier!" she muttered, where she lay among the rhododendrons, while her eyes grew very soft, as she gave the highest word of praise that her whole range of language held. "A true soldier! How he keeps his promise! But it must be bitter!"

She looked awhile, very wistfully, at the Chasseur, where he stood under the Lebanon boughs; then her glance swept bright as a hawk's over the terrace, and lighted with a prescient hatred on the central form of all—a woman's. There were two other great ladies there; but she passed them, and darted with unerring instinct on that proud, fair, patrician head, with its haughty stag-like carriage and the crown of its golden hair.

Cigarette had seen *grandes dames* by the thousand, though never very close; seen them in Paris, when they came to look on at a grand review; seen them in their court attire, when the Guides had filled the Carrousel on some palace ball night, and lined the Cour des Princes, and she had bewitched the officers of the guard into letting her pass in to see the pageantry. But she had never felt for those *grandes dames* anything save a con-

siderably contemptuous indifference. She had looked on them pretty much as a war-worn, powder-tried veteran looks on the curled dandy of some fashionable, home-staying corps. She had never realized the difference betwixt them and herself, save in so far as she thought them useless butterflies, worth nothing at all, and laughed as she triumphantly remembered how she could shoot a man like any Tirailleur, and break in a colt like any rough rider.

Now, for the first time, the sight of one of those aristocrats smote her with a keen hot sting of heart-burning jealousy. Now, for the first time, the little Friend of the Flag looked at all the nameless graces of rank with an envy that her sunny, gladsome, generous nature had never before been touched with—with a sudden perception, quick as thought, bitter as gall, wounding, and swift, and poignant, of what this womanhood, that he had said she herself had lost, might be in its highest and purest shape.

"Unsexed—he said I was unsexed," she mused, while her teeth clinched on the ruby fullness of her lips, and her heart swelled, half with impotent rage, half with unconfessed pain. For the first time, looking on this imperial foreign beauty, sweeping so slowly and so idly along there in the Algerian starlight, she understood all that he had missed, all that he had meant, when he had used that single word, for which she had vowed on him her vengeance and the vengeance of the Army of Africa.

"If those are the women that he knew before he came here, I do not wonder that he never cared to watch even my *bamboula*," was the latent, unacknowledged thought that was so cruel to her: the consciousness—

which forced itself in on her, while her eyes jealously followed the perfect grace of the one in whom instinct had found her rival—that, while she had been so proud of her recklessness, and her devilry, and her trooper's slang, and her deadly skill as a shot, she had only been something very worthless, something very lightly held by those who liked her for a ribald jest, and a guinguette dance, and a Spahis' supper of headlong riot and drunken mirth.

The mood did not last. She was too brave, too fiery, too dauntless, too untamed. The dusky angry flush upon her face grew deeper, and the passion gathered more stormily in her eyes, while she felt the pistol butts in her sash, and laughed low to herself, where she lay stretched under her flowery nest.

"Bah! she would faint, I dare say, at the mere sight of these," she thought, with her old disdain, "and would stand fire no more than a gazelle! They are only made for summer-day weather, those dainty, gorgeous, silver pheasants. A breath of war, a touch of tempest, would soon beat them down—crash!—with all their proud crest drooping!"

Like many another, Cigarette underrated what she had no knowledge of, and depreciated an antagonist the measure of whose fence she had no power to gauge.

Crouched there among the rhododendrons, she lay as still as a mouse, moving nearer and nearer, though none would have told that so much as a lizard even stirred under the blossoms, until her ear, quick and unerring as an Indian's, could detect the sense of the words spoken by that group, which so aroused all the hot ire of her warrior's soul and her democrat's im-

patience. Châteauroy himself was bending his fine dark head toward the patrician on whom her instinct of sex had fastened her hatred.

"You expressed your wish to see my Corporal's little sculptures again, madame," he was murmuring now, as Cigarette got close enough under her flower shadows to catch the sense of the words. "To hear was to obey with me. He waits your commands yonder."

"Mille tonnerres! It was *you*, was it, brought him here?" muttered the Friend of the Flag to herself, with the passion in her burning more hotly against that "silver pheasant," whose delicate train was sweeping the white marbles of Châteauroy's terraces, and whose reply, "with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted," she lost, though she could guess what it had been, when a lackey crossed the lawn, and summoned the Chasseur from his waiting-place beneath the cedars.

Cecil obeyed, passed up the terrace stairs, and stood before his Colonel, giving the salute; the shade of some acacias still fell across him, while the party he fronted were in all the glow of a full Algerian moon, and of the thousand lamps among the belt of flowers and trees. Cigarette gave another sharp deep-drawn breath, and lay as mute and motionless as she had done before then, among the rushes of some dried brook's bed, scanning a hostile camp, when the fate of a handful of French troops had rested on her surety and her caution.

Châteauroy spoke with a carelessness as of a man to a dog, turning to his Corporal.

"Victor, Madame la Princesse honors you with the desire to see your toys again. Spread them out."

The savage authority of his general speech was softened

for sake of his guest's presence, but there was a covert tone in the words that made Cigarette murmur to herself:

"If he forget his promise, I will forgive him!"

Cecil had not forgotten it; neither had he forgotten the lesson that this fair *aristocrate* had read him in the morning. He saluted his chief again, set the chessbox down upon the ledge of the marble balustrade, and stood silent, without once glancing at the fair and haughty face that was more brilliant still in the African starlight than it had been in the noon sun of the Chasseurs' *Chambrée.* Courtesy was forbidden him as insult from a corporal to a nobly born beauty; he no more quarrelled with the decree than with other inevitable consequences, inevitable degradations, that followed on his entrance as a private under the French flag. He had been used to the impassable demarcations of Caste, he did not dispute them more now that he was without, than he had done when within, their magic pale.

The carvings were passed from hand to hand as the Marquis's six or eight guests, listlessly willing to be amused in the warmth of the evening after their dinner, occupied themselves with the ivory chess armies, cut with a skill and a finish worthy a Roman studio. Praise enough was awarded to the art, but none of them remembered the artist who stood apart, grave, calm, with a certain serene dignity that could not be degraded because others chose to treat him as the station he filled gave them fit right to do.

Only one glanced at him with a touch of wondering pity, softening her pride; she who had rejected the gift of those mimic squadrons.

"You were surely a sculptor, once?" she asked him

with that graceful distant kindness which she might have shown some Arab outcast.

"Never, madame."

"Indeed! Then who taught you such exquisite art?"

"It cannot claim to be called art, madame."

She looked at him with an increased interest: the accent of his voice told her that this man, whatever he might be now, had once been a gentleman.

"Oh, yes; it is perfect of its kind. Who was your master in it?"

"A common teacher, madame—Necessity."

There was a very sweet gleam of compassion in the lustre of her dark dreaming eyes.

"Does necessity often teach so well?"

"In the ranks of our army, madame, I think it does; —often indeed much better."

Châteauroy had stood by and heard, with as much impatience as he cared to show before guests whose rank was precious to the man who had still weakness enough to be ashamed that his father's brave and famous life had first been cradled under the thatch roof of a little posting-house.

"Victor knows that neither he nor his men have any right to waste their time on such trash," he said carelessly; "but the truth is they love the canteen so well that they will do anything to add enough to their pay to buy brandy."

She whom he had called Madame la Princesse looked with a doubting surprise at the sculptor of the white Arab King she held.

"That man does not carve for brandy," she thought.

"It must be a solace to many a weary hour in the barracks to be able to produce such beautiful trifles as these," she said aloud. "Surely you encourage such pursuits, monsieur!"

"Not I," said Châteauroy, with a dash of his camp tone that he could not withhold. "There are but two arts or virtues for a trooper to my taste—fighting and obedience."

"You should be in the Russian service, M. de Châteauroy," said the lady with a smile, that, slight as it was, made the Marquis's eyes flash fire.

"Almost I wish I had been," he answered her; "men are made to keep their grades there, and privates who think themselves fine gentlemen receive the lash they merit."

"How he hates his Corporal!" thought Miladi, while she laid aside the White King once more.

"Nay," interposed Châteauroy, recovering his momentary self-abandonment, "since you like the bagatelles, do me honor enough to keep them."

"Oh, no, I offered your soldier his own price for them this morning, and he refused any."

Châteauroy swung round.

"*Ah, sacripant!* you dared refuse your bits of ivory when you were honored by an offer for them."

Cecil stood silent; his eyes met his chief's steadily; Châteauroy had seen that look when his Chasseur had bearded him in the solitude of his tent, and demanded back the Pearl of the Desert.

The Princess glanced at both; then she stooped her elegant head slightly to the Marquis.

"Do not blame your Corporal unjustly through me, I pray you. He refused any price, but he offered them to me very gracefully as a gift, though of course it was not possible that I should accept them so."

"The man is the most insolent *larron* in the service," muttered her host, as he motioned Cecil back off the terrace. "Get you gone, sir, and leave your toys here, or I will have them broken up by a hammer."

The words were low, that they should not offend the ears of the great ladies who were his listeners, but they were coarsely savage in their whispered command, and the Princess heard them.

"He has brought his Chasseur here only to humiliate him," thought Miladi with the same thought that flashed through the mind of the little Friend of the Flag where she hid among her rhododendrons. Now the dainty aristocrat was very proud, but she was not so proud but that justice was stronger in her than pride, and a noble generous temper mellowed the somewhat too cold and languid negligence of one of the fairest and haughtiest women that ever adorned a court. She was too generous not to rescue any one who suffered through her the slightest injustice, not to interfere when through her any misconception lighted on another; she told with her sex's rapid perception and sympathy that the man, whom Châteauroy addressed with the brutal insolence of a bully to his disobedient dog, had once been a gentleman, though he now held but the rank of a sous-officier in the Algerian Cavalry, and she saw that he suffered all the more keenly under an outrage he had no power to resist because of that enforced serenity, that dignity of silence and of patience, with which he stood before his tyrant.

"Wait," she said, moving a little toward them, while she let her eyes rest on the carver of the sculptures with a grave compassion, though she addressed his chief. "You wholly mistake me. I laid no blame whatever on your Corporal. Let him take the chessmen back with him; I would on no account rob him of them. I can well understand that he does not care to part with such masterpieces of his art; and that he would not appraise them by their worth in gold only shows that he is a true artist, as doubtless also he is a true soldier."

The words were spoken with a gracious courtesy, the clear cold tone of her habitual manner just marking in them still the difference of caste between her and the man for whom she interceded, as she would equally have interceded for a dog who should have been threatened with the lash because he had displeased her. That very tone struck a sharper blow to Cecil than the insolence of his commander had power to deal him. His face flushed a little; he lifted his cap to her with a grave reverence, and moved away.

"I thank you, madame. Keep them, if you will so far honor me."

The words reached only her ear, in another instant he had passed away down the terrace steps, obedient to his chief's dismissal.

"Ah! have no kind scruples in keeping them, madame," Châteauroy laughed to her, as she still held in her hand, doubtfully, the White Sheik of the chess Arabs; "I will see that Bel-à-faire-peur, as they call him, does not suffer by losing these trumperies, which, I believe, old Zist-et-Zest, a veteran of ours and a wonderful carver, had really far more to do with producing than he. You must not

let your gracious pity be moved by such fellows as these troopers of mine; they are the most ingenious rascals in the world, and know as well how to produce a dramatic effect in your presence as they do how to drink and to swear when they are out of it."

"Very possibly," she said, with an indolent indifference; "but that man was no actor, and I never saw a gentleman if he have not been one."

"Like enough," answered the Marquis. "I believe many 'gentlemen' come in our ranks who have fled their native countries and broken all laws, from the Decalogue to the Code Napoléon. So long as they fight well, we don't ask their past criminalities. We cannot afford to throw away a good *sabreur* because he has made his own land too hot to hold him."

"Of what country is your Corporal, then?"

"I have not an idea. I imagine his past must have been something very black indeed, for the slightest trace of it has never, that I know of, been allowed to let slip from him. He encourages the men in every insubordination, buys their favor with every sort of stage trick, thinks himself the finest gentleman in the whole brigades of Africa, and ought to have been shot long ago if he had had his real deserts."

She let her glance dwell on him with a contemplation that was half contemptuous amusement, half unexpressed dissent.

"I wonder he has not been, since *you* have the ruling of his fate," she said, with a slight smile lingering about the proud rich softness of her lips.

"So do I."

There was a gaunt, grim, stern significance in the

three monosyllables that escaped him unconsciously; it made her turn and look at him more closely.

"How has he offended you?" she asked.

Châteauroy laughed off the question.

"In a thousand ways, madame. Chiefly because I received my regimental training under one who followed the traditions of the Armies of Egypt and the Rhine, and have, I confess, little tolerance, in consequence, of a rebel who plays the martyr, and a soldier who is too effeminate an idler to do anything except attitudinize in interesting situations to awaken sympathy."

She listened with something of distaste upon her face where she still leaned against the marble balustrade toying with the ivory Bedouins.

"I am not much interested in military discussions," she said, coldly, "but I imagine—if you will pardon me for saying so—that you do your Corporal some little injustice here. I should not fancy he 'affects' anything, to judge from the very good tone of his manners. For the rest, I shall not keep the chessmen without making him fitting payment for them; since he declines money, you will tell me what form that had better take to be of real and welcome service to a Chasseur d'Afrique."

Châteauroy, more incensed than he chose or dared to show, bowed courteously, but with a grim ironic smile.

"If you really insist, give him a napoléon or two whenever you see him; he will be very happy to take it and spend it *au cabaret*, though he played the aristocrat to-day. But you are too good to him; he is one of the very worst of my *pratiques*, and you are as cruel to me in refusing to deign to accept my trooper's worthless bagatelles at my hands."

She bent her superb head silently, whether in acquiescence or rejection he could not well resolve with himself, and turned to the staff-officers, among them the heir of a princely semi-royal French House, who surrounded her, and sorely begrudged the moments she had given to those miniature carvings and the private soldier who had wrought them. She was no coquette; she was of too imperial a nature, had too lofty a pride, and was too difficult to charm or to enchain; but those meditative, brilliant, serene eyes had a terrible gift of wakening without ever seeking love, and of drawing without ever recompensing homage.

Couched down among her rose-hued covert, Cigarette had watched and heard, her teeth set tightly, her breath coming and going swiftly, her hand clinched close on the butts of her pistols, fiery curses, with all the infinite variety in cursing of a barrack *répertoire*, chasing one another in hot fast mutterings off those bright lips, that should have known nothing except a child's careless and innocent song.

"*Comme elle est belle! comme elle est belle!*" she whispered every now and then to herself, with a new, bitter, ferocious meaning in the whisper that had, with all its hate, something pathetic too. She had never looked at a beautiful high-bred woman before, holding them in gay satirical disdain as mere *papillons rouants* who could not prime a revolver and fire it off to save their own lives, if ever such need arose; a depth of ignorance that was, to the vivandière's view, the ne plus ultra of crassitude and impotence. But now she studied one through all the fine, quickened, unerring instincts of jealousy; and there is no instinct in the world that gives such thorough appreciation of the very rival it

reviles. She saw the courtly negligence, the regal grace, the fair brilliant loveliness, the delicious serene languor, of a pure "*aristocrate*" for the very first time to note them, and they made her heart sick with a new and deadly sense; they moved her much as the white delicate carvings of the lotus-lilies and the lentiscus-leaves had done; they, like the carvings, showed her all she had missed. She dropped her head suddenly, like a wounded bird, and the racy vindictive camp-oaths died off her lips. She thought of herself as she had danced that mad Bacchic *bamboula* amid the crowd of shouting, stamping, drunken, half-infuriated soldiery, and for the moment she hated herself more even than she hated that patrician yonder.

"I know what he meant *now!*" she pondered, and her spirited, sparkling, brunette face was dark and weary, like a brown sun-lightened brook over whose radiance the heavy shadow of some broad-spread eagle's wings hovers, hiding the sun.

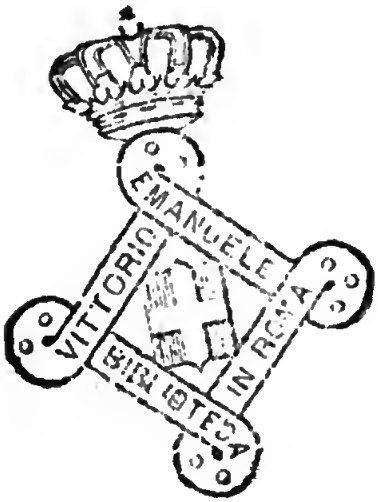
She looked once, twice, thrice, more inquiringly, envyingly, thirstily; then, as the band under the cedars rolled out their music afresh, and light laughter echoed to her from the terrace, she turned and wound herself back under the cover of the shrubs, not joyously and mischievously as she had come, but almost as slowly, almost as sadly, as a hare that the greyhounds have coursed drags itself through the grasses and ferns.

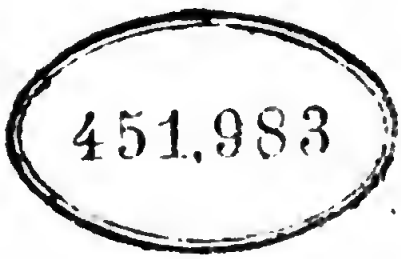
Once through the cactus hedge her old spirit returned; she shook herself angrily with petulant self-scorn; she swore a little, and felt that the fierce familiar words did her good like brandy poured down her throat; she tossed her head like a colt that rebels against the gall of the curb; then, fleet as a fawn, she dashed down the moonlit

road at topmost speed. "Diantre! she can't do what I do!" she thought.

And she ran the faster, and sang a drinking-song of the Spahis all the louder, because still at her heart a dull pain was aching.

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